

The background of the entire page is a vibrant orange color, overlaid with a pattern of smaller, semi-transparent orange triangles and diamonds. These shapes are scattered across the page, creating a dynamic and geometric texture. The triangles and diamonds vary in size and orientation, some pointing upwards, some downwards, and some rotated 45 degrees.

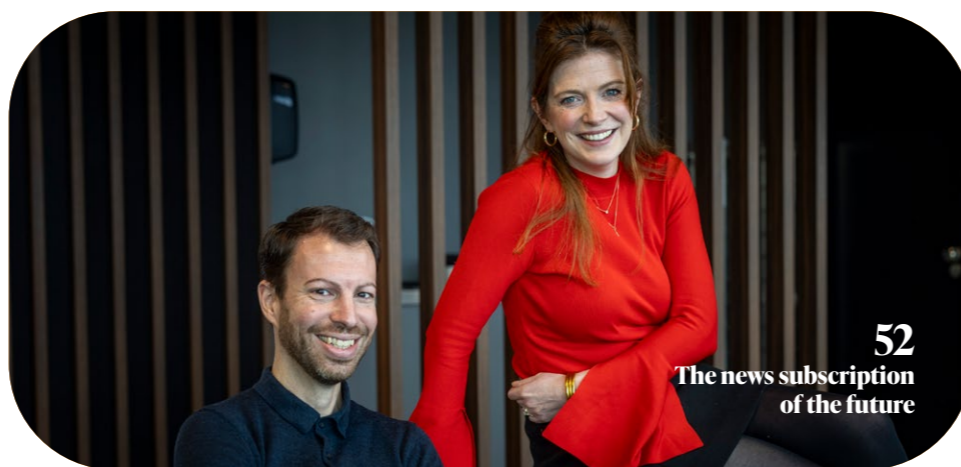
# Shaping *the future* of journalism



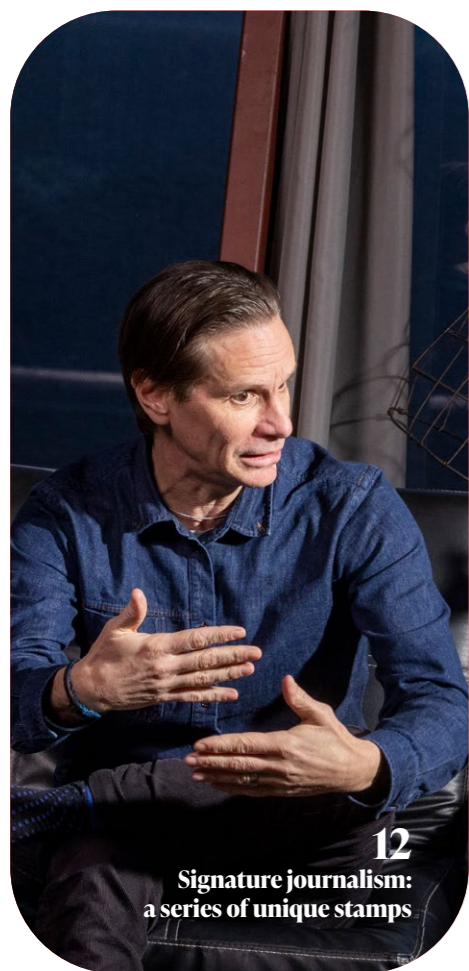
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in the ear of the masses



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The news subscription  
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# Staying strong in turbulent times

2024 was another good year for Mediahuis. Our major and smaller news brands continued to develop well, while our new ventures in radio and marketplaces saw growth. Consequently, our financial results remained solid. Thanks to our strong performance, we are now among the top performers in our sector in Europe.

However, this satisfaction is tempered by the awareness that we are operating in an increasingly fragile environment. We face the challenge of reaching a new generation that has yet to find their way to nuanced and paid journalism. We are also dealing with the continuous rise of many costs, particularly in the distribution of printed newspapers. Additionally, we see how those in power in various countries instrumentalise polarisation and the undermining of trust in the media to strengthen their grip on the electorate.

Independent journalism is coming under increasing pressure around the world. It is particularly worrying that major companies in the United States have shown a lack of backbone by simply giving in to the first attempts at intimidation. Safeguarding business interests suddenly outweighed long-held principles, and the speed at which certain previously proclaimed values were abandoned was downright shocking. Even within some European Union countries, the independence and diversity of the media have been under strain for

some time, putting the rule of law itself at risk.

Mediahuis does not passively accept these developments. To engage younger generations, we are making significant investments in new forms of journalism and innovative projects. We are doing this while keeping a disciplined grip on our costs, even if that sometimes means making difficult decisions. After all, financial stability is a necessary condition for safeguarding our editorial independence.

We also continuously question ourselves and have initiated concrete measures to assess and strengthen our readers' trust in the quality of our reporting. Finally, we remain the driving force behind Pluralis, a fund we co-founded with several partners to protect the diversity of independent and critical voices in those European countries where press freedom is or has been under threat.

This annual review highlights all these initiatives. They give me confidence in our future. Even in an increasingly complex European environment, Mediahuis, with its more than 4,400 talented employees, continues to stand firm and invest in the future. This is the only way we can continue to fulfil our societal mission.

**Thomas Leysen**  
Chairman

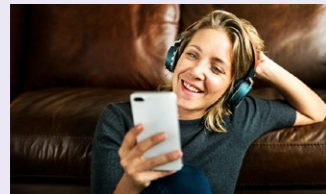




# Mediahuis Group in figures 2024

**Daily reach  
10 million people**

**€1.2 billion  
turnover**



**98.3 million**  
podcast listeners

**More than 30  
news brands**

46%  
print

**1.8 million  
subscribers**

54%  
digital

**4,455  
employees**

48%  
journalists

**25  
marketplaces**



**9  
radio stations**

**70 Flanders Classics  
cycling events**

professional and recreational

## News brand reach per country

### Euractiv

More than 44,000  
Europeans every day

### Netherlands

1 in 3 Dutch people

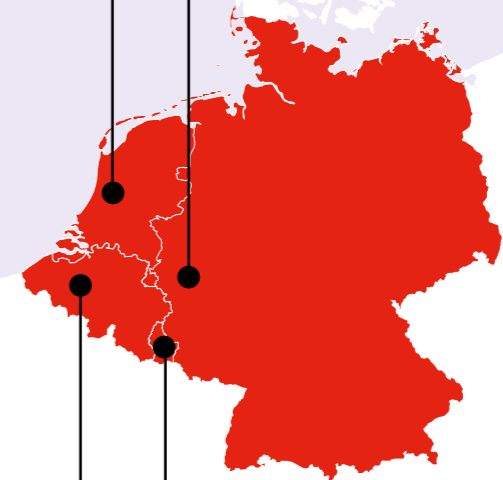
### Germany

1 in 4 people in the Aachen region



### Ireland

1 in 2 Irish people



### Belgium

1 in 3 Belgian people

### Luxembourg

1 in 2 residents  
of Luxembourg





# Building a *powerhouse* of independent journalism together

In her book *The Tech Coup*, former MEP Marietje Schaake warns about the growing power of the largest technology companies. “We have become so dependent on these companies that they now fulfil crucial societal functions without any public accountability. This harms democracy,” she says. Not only is democracy under pressure, so too are the independence of journalism and of critical thinking. It is up to us to continue providing the much-needed counterbalance.

*Text: Gert Ysebaert  
Images: Frederik Beyens*

## Independent journalism as an antidote

Polarisation in society and geopolitical tensions are everywhere. Major public debates are becoming increasingly heated, and many people are experiencing growing uncertainty. This presents opportunities for us as news media. In a world where information is available anytime and anywhere, we have a crucial role in providing nuance, context and reliability.

Our digital lives shape the way we view the world. What we see on our phones influences our thoughts

and actions. The battle for access to consumers’ and citizens’ screens is raging worldwide, and the Big Tech players have a massive head start.

User data is the new gold for American and Chinese superpowers, and billions in advertising revenue is funnelled into their social media platforms, driven by impenetrable algorithms. This cements their dominance at the expense of local ecosystems. Add the AI revolution to the mix, and we find ourselves in a perfect storm. Europe recognises the danger, but regulators struggle to keep up.

Being a trusted guide in a world full of change has been our mission

for years. In 2025, that change is more profound than ever. But so too is our belief in the importance of independent journalism. It is the ultimate antidote to polarisation and misinformation. We must continue to assume our responsibility, especially when it comes to younger audiences who consume most of their news via social media. It is up to us to remain on their radar and win them over to our journalism.

“Independent journalism is the ultimate antidote to polarisation and misinformation”





## Tackling challenges together

To continue fulfilling our role, we must constantly innovate and adapt to a rapidly evolving landscape. Collaboration is essential to staying strong and preparing for the future. That is why I see Mediahuis as a powerhouse of independent journalism – a group where we strengthen each other and achieve much more together than we ever could individually.

Our challenges are largely the same across different markets, so we tackle them together while preserving the unique identity of each local brand. Our acquisitions and partnerships in recent years all align with this philosophy. We build strong, distinctive brands that stand for quality and trust. And within our group, we can always rely on each other's knowledge and experience to address specific challenges.

The strength of our group lies in our combination of technology, expertise and talent. This enables us to maintain a strong market position and remain relevant. For example, we are investing in AI at the group level. While smaller, traditional media brands often lack the resources, as a group we can fully leverage AI's potential and be at the forefront of innovation. We make technology accessible and widely deployable so that all our national and regional news brands can prepare for a sustainable future.

Additionally, we strengthen each other in the way we bring journalism to our audiences. The shared expertise in how we distribute our stories across digital platforms is invaluable. However, this doesn't mean a one-size-fits-all approach – we maximize the benefits of scale while safeguarding the unique identity of each of our titles.

## Opportunities for growth

With nearly 4,500 employees and operations in several countries, Mediahuis has grown into an international company with strong positions in news media, radio and marketplaces. This international context not only provides economies of scale but also creates opportunities for our employees to grow and develop.

Our strength lies in learning from each other across borders and departments. We bring people together to contribute to the future of our group. We apply this shared knowledge, resources and insights daily to provide our readers, listeners and viewers – young and old – with accurate and reliable information.

As a powerhouse of independent journalism, we will continue building strong news brands that all generations can trust. That is a commitment we make together.

“As a group, we strengthen each other and achieve much more together than we ever could individually”

Gert Ysebaert





*“With signature journalism, we secure our future”*

GERBEN VAN 'T HEK  
& INDRA DEWITTE

Just around the corner from our Mediahuis Nederland colleagues is a hidden gem of old-school entrepreneurship: The Glasshouse. A visionary Dutch entrepreneur—yes, they exist, and they’re a breed of their own—transformed a few rusty shipping containers into a quirky and original venue for parties, meetings and even interviews. Despite the biting cold, which just about freezes you to your seat, you can almost taste the promise of colourful summer cocktails. Unfortunately, it’s winter. So we get started with some coffee, a laptop and a biscuit. For the latest Mediahuis annual report, we want to talk about the future of journalism. Enter the new Strategy Director Newsroom. Ladies and gentlemen: meet GerBen van ‘t Hek.

*Text: Indra Dewitte,  
editor-in-chief  
Het Belang van Limburg*

*Images: Marcel Molle*



## Creating the right mix

**GerBen, you're Strategy Director Newsroom at Mediahuis group. Titles don't get much better. What exactly does your role entail?**

"[Laughing] Just to be clear, I didn't come up with the title myself. I plan the newsrooms of the future. It's a broad mission, but for me, our journalism is at the core. First and foremost, it's about signature journalism and maintaining our diversity. It's great to work for a company that believes in our distinct brands. We want to collaborate more in terms of technology and organisational processes, but when it comes to content, we want our brands to remain as unique as possible."

**Signature journalism as the foundation for the future – that sounds good. But how do you put that promise into practice?**

"By asking ourselves the right questions. How can we create journalism that's better than the competition? How can we be unique? To succeed, you need to know your DNA. We've spent years

thinking about this for our print publications, but in the digital world, we're not as far advanced. To be successful digitally, you don't need 200 stories a day. But which 10 or 20 stories make the difference?

"Signature journalism is about the right mix of topics, delivered in the right form and format. Take our homepages: are they just a random collection of stories, or is there a strategy behind them? If you were to relaunch Het Belang van Limburg today as a purely digital brand, would you create exactly what exists now? Or would you adjust the mix? Newsrooms need to think about this. Are we reaching the right digital audience? What does the data tell us? It's a difficult exercise, but done well, it naturally leads to a unique signature."

**Are there things we should stop doing to safeguard our uniqueness?**

"Absolutely. I don't believe we can make a difference in the future with just breaking news. No one is going to pay for pure news reports anymore; those are available for free everywhere. We need to focus on unique stories and the right mix.

According to media analyst Thomas Baekdal, this approach naturally creates more room for distinctive journalism.

"We should also invest more in video and audio, which our online audience increasingly demands. Sometimes, this means stopping certain things, choosing not to produce something anymore. Take a critical look at your site's menu structure. If something is buried three clicks deep, is it still worth your energy?"

**"Signature journalism requires a lot of work, but it's the only way to create a unique brand"**

GerBen van 't Hek

**You mention Baekdal. What stands out to me is that he increasingly emphasises the importance of the brand and journalistic diversity. That's hopeful, isn't it?**

"Certainly. Baekdal says that a strong brand contributes to trust in our journalism. He sees this in stark

contrast to a world where fake news and AI are running rampant. A news title is built on solid foundations, has a clear profile and has people behind it. Some think that a brand has become unimportant, but the opposite is true.

"[Enthusiastically] We need to embrace and emphasise the power of our diversity even more. The core of our product and our distinguishing ability should be at the centre. We don't all need a separate app or six different tools to create online maps. Content will make the difference. Just look at Spotify. The real success comes from Taylor Swift, Chopin and everything in between, not the technology."



## Elections 2024: a digital milestone for Nieuwsblad

Nearly 5 million people in Flanders went to the polls in 2024 for the federal, Flemish, European and local elections, and it was a big moment for the newsroom of Nieuwsblad. For the first time, the focus was entirely on a digital news environment, allowing us to fully capitalise on its advantages.

Live coverage was central, but the newspaper went further and developed a strategy with key focal points that were implemented across the entire site. For the national elections, the various party platforms were analysed and their proposals grouped by theme into a user-friendly tool. With every election-related article, readers immediately gained insight into their preferred party's positions.

In addition, we developed a voting test that matched voters with political parties – already a challenge at the national level, but an even greater feat for the local elections. Nieuwsblad's regional newsroom created a separate voting test for every Flemish municipality, gathering large amounts of data and mapping out all local party leaders. A dedicated

tool allowed readers to discover who their candidate for mayor really was. Hannes Heynderickx, political editor at Nieuwsblad: "For the national elections, we took things a step further. Inspired by our colleagues at De Telegraaf, we invited the seven party leaders – including the former and current prime ministers – for an in-depth discussion. In a podcast with editor-in-chief Liesbeth Van Impe and myself, they shared their vision, answered light-hearted questions on our social media and debated with other key figures. All the content was gathered online by party, guiding readers from the start of the campaign to the voting booth."

On election days, the entire newsroom was mobilised, including Nieuwsblad's extensive network of local correspondents. Coverage combined an intuitive results tool, live updates by region, on-the-ground reports following politicians and in-depth analysis from political experts. Podcasts and video analysis were recorded in the newsroom and published the same day.

The roadmap for the next election year is already in place, focusing on distinctive journalism and the smart use and reuse of content.





## Journalism is not a cookie factory

**I know you're critical of artificial intelligence, yet you're leading a major project on its implementation in our newsrooms. How do you reconcile that?**

"AI can help us keep our model afloat by improving and making our processes more efficient. But it can also help translate or transform our journalism into audio and video. AI will undoubtedly mean a lot for us, and we shouldn't be afraid of it. It won't replace journalism.

"For example, what AI will never be able to do is be there live [he gestures with his arms]. Do you see an AI tool going out to interview people or telling stories where our audience can recognise themselves? No, of course not. Journalists will retain that role."

**"Journalists are usually not frontrunners. We will need to adjust that mindset"**

GerBen van 't Hek

**Many journalists remain sceptical. AI is intriguing but it also raises concerns.**

"Journalists are not usually frontrunners, we have to admit that. We like to stick to what we know; we just want to tell stories. That mindset needs to shift, but it won't happen overnight. It helps if we integrate AI tools that support our journalism into our daily workflows. We need to embed them in CUE [Mediahuis' new editorial system]. To successfully implement AI, we must make it part of our creative process."

**We are, of course, journalists, and we have an ethical code that we must adhere to.**

"That goes without saying, we're not a cookie factory. A person – preferably the original creator – must always be the last in line when we

produce content. Actually, that's the only thing a journalist should focus on: the content of their unique story. Where and how it's played out, that's not something they should lose sleep over."

## More Instagram than newspaper

**Should we dare to be more disruptive? And stop using paper?**

"I don't think so. As long as there's an audience for the printed newspaper and we can still deliver that product, why would we stop? Distribution issues, though, could throw a spanner in the works. We've already noticed that in Belgium, and there's a similar risk in the Netherlands. Last year, I spent a night delivering newspapers with a couple in West Friesland. They can barely find replacements when they want to take a week off. Our distribution is vulnerable. So, we really need to ensure that our print readers transition to digital as quickly as possible."

**Agreed, but then comes the million-dollar question: how are we going to do that?**

"We're underestimating our digital newspapers. We can still rely on loyal readers and long reading times. The e-paper still has a good while ahead of it. In addition, we're working on new digital bundles, the bundle of the future. This will go live this year, and will be a mix with modern design, more Instagram than newspaper. It offers a lot of opportunities, especially to better use and reuse our extensive long-tail content.

"Readers will be able to create their own story mix and easily share it. You could end up viewing your neighbour's, your mayor's or even the minister's weekly bundle. A lot of things we publish now are only visible for a few hours on the homepage, and then they disappear from sight. We make it to forget it.



**"Content will make the difference. Just like Taylor Swift and Chopin make Spotify's success"**

GerBen van 't Hek



It's a shame, because it means we're chasing our own tail. We need to do better. The goal is for a subscriber to stay with us as long as possible. Attention time is crucial: the more and longer a reader engages, the more they'll be willing to pay for our journalism."

**Attention time is important, no one would argue with that, but is it enough to retain a subscriber?**

"Certainly not; we need more. We can't just focus on that time, but rather on whether that time is well spent. The ambition is for a subscriber to visit every day, and for that to happen, they must get value for their money. If you only use Netflix once a month, you won't keep paying for that expensive subscription.

"We're conducting a study with the universities of Amsterdam and Leuven.

Time can be measured precisely, but the central question of the study is whether our stories actually add something to the reader's life. Did the news truly have value? And can we come up with a model to make that measurable?"

**Very interesting. Do you see other revenue models emerging, outside of our own platforms?**

"That's a tough question. Dependence on others, like Google or Meta, is risky. On the other hand, it's hard for us to retreat to an island. We need external platforms for our branding, for instance. A new audience no longer gets to know us through the printed newspaper on the kitchen table, but through other platforms. Spotify is a great place to get to know us, through our podcasts."

**In Flanders, we have a popular TV chef, Piet Huysentruyt, who always ends his show with the question: 'What did we learn today?' Can you summarise our conversation in three points?**

"[Looks surprised] Oh, that's a tough one! But OK, I'll give it a try. One: we need to clearly define the right mix. First the mix, then the clicks. Two: we shouldn't be afraid of AI. It should make us better than we already are. And three: if we do this right, we'll secure our future. I firmly believe that people have a need for strong journalism and that they're willing to pay for it."

**Amen. There's nothing more to add. And if your enthusiasm is directly proportional to our chances of success, the future looks bright.**

**"The ambition is for a subscriber to visit every day, and for that to happen, they must get value for their money"**

GerBen van 't Hek



**GVA**

## Gazet van Antwerpen follows the money of Antwerp's drug mafia

The influence of Antwerp's criminals on Dubai's real estate market is far greater than previously thought. This became clear from data obtained by Gazet van Antwerpen crime journalists Sam Reyntjens and Joris Van der Aa, which contained some striking details.

In recent years, Antwerp residents have bought and sold nearly half a billion euros worth of villas and apartments in Dubai. In April 2020, a Belgian child, just 1 year and 11 days old, was named as the buyer of an exclusive villa in District One. The property, with a living space of approximately 200m<sup>2</sup>, cost around €15 million.

But the investigation also shed light on the economic reality behind a line of cocaine. The series explored where the drug mafia might really feel the impact: their financial flows. Moreover, it revealed how they

use their money to generate even more profit by speculating on lucrative property markets like Dubai.

The Narco-Immo series was developed by cross-referencing Dubai real estate transaction lists with GVA's meticulously maintained database of drug-related convictions in Antwerp. Every convicted Antwerp drug criminal, along with their family members and companies, was checked for links to properties in the emirate. GVA reporter Greg Van Roosbroeck also delved into the lives of Dubai's ultra-wealthy. What is life in a multimillion-euro villa really like?

Months of investigative work by Gazet van Antwerpen resulted in 10 days of in-depth reporting, featuring profiles, interactive articles, videos and podcasts on how Antwerp's drug criminals launder their profits. Targeted online and outdoor marketing campaigns, including a mural opposite Antwerp's courthouse, reinforced the news coverage. The series led to record traffic for Flanders' third-largest news website, with more than 600,000 unique visitors and 2.4 million page views.





# Our journalism wins awards

In 2024, our journalists once again contributed to public debate and captivated audiences with their in-depth and diverse reporting. These efforts have not gone unnoticed, earning prestigious awards in various disciplines.



## INMA GLOBAL MEDIA AWARD BEST USE OF AN EVENT TO BUILD A NEWS BRAND

In the run-up to the Dutch parliamentary elections, the leaders of the seven largest political parties each curated their own page in the printed newspaper.



## INTERNATIONAL CREATIVE MEDIA AWARD, AWARD OF EXCELLENCE MAGAZINES PRINT – ECONOMY AND FINANCES

Recognition for the Alternative Investment edition of Luxembourg Times Magazine, highlighting its high quality and creativity, as well as the passion and dedication invested in each issue.

Creators: Christian Mertes and the Luxembourg Times team



## DAPHNE CARUANA GALIZIA PRIZE FOR JOURNALISM

Lost in Europe, an investigation conducted with journalists from Knack and VRT NWS, revealed that more than 51,000 unaccompanied minor migrants went missing in Europe between 2021 and 2023.

Creators: Roeland Termote and Wouter Woussen



## MENTAL HEALTH MEDIA AWARDS PRINT & ONLINE NATIONAL

“It was degrading” tells the story of Justyna Maslanka, a woman from Dublin who was involuntarily admitted to two public hospitals in the city, one of which has since closed. She describes how the conditions there “undermined her dignity”.

Creator: Eilish O'Regan



## SASKIA STUIVELING PRIZE REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLITICAL JOURNALISM

In May 2023, the asylum crisis in Ter Apel peaked, with asylum seekers forced to sleep in waiting rooms. Since then, pressure on the Groningen asylum centre has been immense, while the rest of the Netherlands seems to look away.

Creator: Maaïke Borst



## EUROPEAN NEWSPAPER AWARDS EUROPEAN NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

The ultimate recognition for the newspaper's design, both in print and digital.

Creators: NRC Design Team



## FOUNDATION FOR NARRATIVE JOURNALISM: MASTER STORYTELLERS

Gert Regterschot, a former lecturer at TU Eindhoven, has been providing unpaid supplemental education since his dismissal in 1995. Under a staircase on campus, he helps students with complex technical subjects, boosting their confidence while hoping for recognition and compensation for his years of work.

Creator: Denise Retera



## INMA GLOBAL MEDIA AWARDS HONOURABLE MENTION:

- BEST NEW DIGITAL PRODUCT
- BEST PRODUCT ITERATION

The Stories app from Dagblad van het Noorden, Leeuwarder Courant and Friesch Dagblad received an honourable mention for the innovative way it showcases the eight best stories in a striking display: full-screen, featuring great photography and/or video, in a vertically scrolling carousel.



## JUSTICE MEDIA AWARDS INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE REPORTING

Awarded for an article about Google, which was forced to stop informing publishers about decisions regarding the right to be forgotten.

Creator: Shane Phelan



## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AWARD ARTICLE

“Olhem para nós” (“Look at us”) tells the story of people sleeping on the streets of Luxembourg City, weeks after the city council introduced a ban on begging.

Creators: Ricardo Rodrigues (Contacto) and Marc Wilwert (Luxemburger Wort)



## ANNUAL AWARD FOR SCIENCE COMMUNICATION, ROYAL FLEMISH ACADEMY OF BELGIUM FOR SCIENCE AND THE ARTS

The Centre for Environmental Sciences at UHasselt coordinated a large-scale citizen research project that mapped soil quality in Limburg. After a call in Het Belang van Limburg, more than 5,000 people signed up to participate. The newspaper presented the research results in a series of articles in early 2024.





**Irish Independent**

**CD SMURFIT SCHOOL BUSINESS JOURNALIST AWARDS**  
BUSINESS NEWS STORY OF THE YEAR

Thousands of people saw their mortgages transferred to vulture funds and were denied access to the state's financial ombudsman. The article investigating the story led to a change in legislation.

Creator: Charlie Weston

**nrc**

**NATIONAL PRIZE FOR EDUCATION JOURNALISM**

Who still wants to teach? To answer that question, Patricia Veldhuis – then an education reporter, now NRC's editor-in-chief – taught Dutch at a high school for a year. Her experiences were sometimes intense, in both the classroom and the teachers' lounge.

Creator: Patricia Veldhuis

**MEDIAHUIS IRELAND**

**AIB PRESS PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR AWARDS**  
PORTRAIT & MULTIMEDIA AWARD

Photographer: Mark Condren

**Belfast Telegraph**

**REGIONAL PRESS AWARDS**  
MULTIPLE AWARDS, INCLUDING LARGE NEWS BRAND OF THE YEAR, WEBSITE OF THE YEAR AND BEST LIVE COVERAGE

**Sunday Independent**

**IRISH JOURNALISM AWARDS**  
SHOWBIZ WRITER OF THE YEAR  
Dónal Lynch

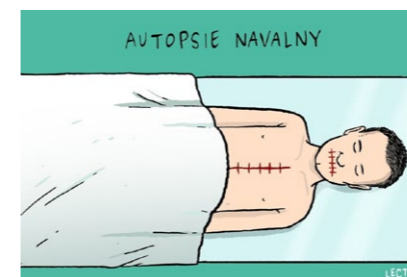
SPORTSWRITER OF THE YEAR  
Cathal Dennehy

**De Standaard**

**EUROPEAN CARTOON AWARDS**

The cartoon "Autopsie Navalny" by Steven "Lectrr" Degryse was a comment on the death of Russian politician and activist Alexei Navalny.

Cartoonist: Steven Degryse (Lectrr)



**nrc**

**KAVLI SCIENCE JOURNALISM AWARDS**  
SILVER AWARD

Patient number 935: Gemma Venhuizen received this award for her personal account of the major heart surgery she underwent due to an enlarged aorta.

Creator: Gemma Venhuizen

**SUNDAY WORLD**

**REGIONAL PRESS AWARDS**  
FRONT PAGE OF THE YEAR

For the Blind Courage front page, which tells the shocking story of a mother from Craigavon who stood up to a gang leader after he left her blind in a brutal attack.

**Belfast Telegraph**

Weekend magazine

**UK NEWSPAPER AWARDS**  
REGIONAL SUPPLEMENT OF THE YEAR

**Belfast Telegraph**

**MEDIA FREEDOM AWARDS**  
REGIONAL NEWS MEDIA ORGANISATION OF THE YEAR

**The Kerryman**

**MENTAL HEALTH MEDIA AWARDS**  
SINGLE PRINT OR ONLINE NEWS REPORT

The heartbreaking story of Ergin Kuccuk in the aftermath of the 2023 Turkish earthquake.

Creator: Stephen Fernane

**Belfast Telegraph**

**PRESS GAZETTE BRITISH JOURNALISM AWARDS**  
LOCAL JOURNALISM

Recognised for its reporting on the environmental crisis in Lough Neagh and the Killing Edgar podcast, which explores the IRA murder of Edgar Graham.

Creator: Sam McBride

**nrc**

**DE TEGEL**  
INTERVIEW

Ali Niknam, CEO of online bank bunq, pushes his mostly young employees to the limit. This led to an in-depth investigation and a widely discussed article on the "Ali method", where Niknam defended his approach in a broader societal debate on success and employee well-being.

Creator: Stijn Bronzwaer

**Irish Independent** **Sunday Independent**

**IRISH JOURNALISM AWARDS**  
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM / JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR

An investigative report revealed how multiple female footballers were subjected to unwanted or inappropriate sexual advances by coaches in the 1990s.

Creators: Mark Tighe and Marie Crowe



# Our news brands

Our wide range of strong, independent news brands lies at the heart of our journalistic mission. Each title contributes in its own way to a reliable and diverse news offering, deeply rooted in society. From national, regional and local newspapers to digital platforms, we continue to invest in journalism that informs, explains and connects.

Europe  
**EURACTIV**

## Ireland and Northern Ireland

- Irish Independent 
- Sunday Independent 
- Belfast Telegraph
- 
- 
- 

## Belgium

- 
- 
- De Standaard
- 
- 












## Luxembourg

- 
- 
- LUXEMBOURG TIMES
- 

## Germany

-  Aachener Zeitung

## Netherlands

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# *Winning trust amid the noise*



**Last Christmas, I reread 1984, George Orwell's dystopian novel. When I first devoured the book as a history student, the world he described seemed light years away. It was the 1990s. The Berlin Wall had fallen, the stock market was booming and liberal progressivism was triumphant – who was still worried about totalitarian regimes?**

*Text: Patricia Veldhuis, editor-in-chief, NRC  
Image: Andreas Terlaak*

## **The party of lies**

Thirty years later, the story hit me with a new force. Here are the reflections of protagonist Winston Smith during his work at the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth, where he spends his grey days rewriting *The Times*:

“The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth.”

In this age, where opinions and facts blur, where big tech companies collaborate with political powers, and misinformation is deliberately used for economic and political gain, Winston Smith's world feels far closer than I could have imagined 30 years ago.

We fight daily for attention and trust, for influence and power. The traditional institutions – politics, the rule of law, the media – seem to be losing to the irresistible pull of social media. Trust in traditional media is low and declining year after year. Those who already know us trust us. But the gap with people who do not subscribe to any of our titles is huge.





## “We’re embedding trust as a core value”

Trust is important – no, essential – for the future of journalism. Without trust, even the best journalism will not attract readers. That is precisely why building and maintaining trust has been a central focus at Mediahuis over the past year. And that is why we joined The Trust Project.

The Trust Project was founded in 2014 by American journalist Sally Lehrman. The goal? To strengthen readers’ trust in journalism through a structured process and clear trust indicators. At the end of this process, you receive the Trust Label, but more importantly, you embed trust as a core value within your organisation.

Mediahuis Aachen participated in this project alongside Mediahuis Luxembourg, Mediahuis Ireland and Mediahuis NRC. We invested significant effort in implementing

the trust indicators developed by Lehrman. These indicators are a set of standards that help news organisations demonstrate their transparency and distinguish high-quality journalism from less reliable sources. This includes details about the authors and the organisation, the research methodology and guidelines for correcting errors.

We not only adjusted internal standards, we also actively involved our readers in the process to gain their trust. They should better understand how we report and why, through insights into our working methods and the high journalistic standards we uphold.

After nearly 12 months in The Trust Project, the first phase is almost complete. We have conducted training for our editorial team to ensure that every journalist understands the importance of transparency and credibility. Additionally, technical adjustments are being made to our website to

visibly integrate the trust indicators and clearly inform readers about our working methods.

The process has been very intense and insightful. But for us, the label is not the finish line. Aachener Zeitung remains fully committed to strengthening readers’ trust and setting an example of responsible journalism.

**Thomas Thelen,**  
editor-in-chief,  
Aachener Zeitung



## Echo chamber

People who trust us are generally more highly educated, have higher incomes and are more often left-leaning, according to research by Motivaction. They are also older. Younger people show far less interest in regular news. And the lower the interest, the lower the trust – meaning we seem to be stuck in a negative spiral. That’s worrying – and not just for the future of our titles.

The irony is that those who turn their backs on traditional media often trust the flow of half-truths and outright lies they receive daily on X, Instagram or TikTok. Conspiracy theories spread like wildfire, whether about people eating dogs or the “truth” behind 9/11.

This is a direct threat to public health. The nonsense spread by the current president of the United States about injecting bleach to fight Covid-19 was taken seriously by some. And the message from popular influencers that breast cancer screening is harmful and eating clay is good leads to unnecessary deaths.

At a more abstract level, the lack of trust in traditional media threatens democracy. Those who rely solely on unfounded online hype are trapped deeper in the bubble of their own beliefs. This leads to a politically unstable climate, mutual distrust, less understanding of “the other”, declining solidarity and growing polarisation.



# “Ironically, those who turn their backs on traditional media often trust the stream of half-truths and outright lies on social media”

Patricia Veldhuis

## “How do we ‘do’ trust? Stick to the basics and be transparent”

Our audiences generally love what we do, but they often don’t understand how we do it, or why we do it a certain way. The process of making journalism has not necessarily changed. Let’s not lose sight of the basic standards for journalists, to which we still adhere.

First things first. If the choice is between being right and being first, then be right. But better to be right and be first. That also means right in interpretation, context and meaning.

Checking and double-checking the facts of a story will always remain a huge part of the reporter’s function. More sources for more insight. More information from identifiable sources. Always offer an opportunity for all sides to comment. If news editors interrogate stories on the finer points, it’s also up to them and to the sub-editors and key production staff to challenge and interrogate the facts.

We are increasingly conscious of the meaning of each story –

a headline might be technically correct, but is it correct in substance? Again: right in interpretation, context and meaning. Let’s not give our audience an opportunity to doubt what we do.

What has changed is how transparent we are or at least try to be. We have in recent years developed clear public-facing policies governing our journalism, our editorial code of practice and how people can contact us.

There are many routes for the audience to query a story. We can be contacted directly, we can be contacted through our online complaints form, we can be contacted through customer care. We take every complaint and communication seriously and try to respond to all of them in a timely and reasonable manner.

One of the fundamental mistakes we can make as journalists is to try to pretend we don’t make mistakes. Even journalists with supreme expertise can miss a nuance and misunderstand a meaning – we are unlikely to be as expert as the

experts. However, our job is to try to explain the world to the people who live in it.

Recently, to improve transparency, we have updated our corrections policy – in line with our work towards partnership with The Trust Project – to make sure that when a story is corrected, a footnote is included concerning the correction.

Instead of simply trying to be seen to be right, it is just as important that we are seen to be able to hold our hands up and be seen to be wrong.

**Cormac Bourke,**  
editor-in-chief,  
Mediahuis Ireland





## Preaching to the converted

The recent Maccabi riots in Amsterdam are a sad example. Even before anyone had gathered the facts, far-right parties were exploiting the events for their own political agendas. Geert Wilders was the first to react on X, and his message coloured the subsequent coverage. The media and politics were trapped in his frame, and that frame unnecessarily heightened the integration debate in the Netherlands. When NRC – unfortunately only at the second attempt – reconstructed the riots in detail, a much more nuanced picture emerged of what had happened that night.

This is exactly what we must do: search for the facts. And when those facts aren't clear yet, we must name what we don't know. The foundation of our work as journalists is, after all, truth-seeking. Amid all the noise and framing, we must search for what's really going on. We must seek out multiple perspectives – and we must loudly amplify those voices.

We don't always do this well enough, and I also hold myself accountable. We struggle with our stance on the platforms of tech companies. Should we stay on X and Facebook, or should we leave? Personally, I don't believe in leaving – we must be present everywhere now to increase our impact. If Meta announces it's firing its fact-checkers, we must step forward. Because we will continue to check the facts.

It is more important than ever to be present in as many places as possible – even where people don't believe in us. We don't do this by preaching to our own parish at conferences or in annual reports. Instead, we do it by showing ourselves with the best news apps, with smart marketing, at events where our journalists are on stage in front of packed audiences, with more podcasts and social videos to reach new and young audiences.

By showing who we are and what we do, we win their trust – against all the odds.

“The foundation of our work is truth-seeking. Amid all the noise and framing, we must uncover what's really going on”

Patricia Veldhuis

### “We gain trust through sharing our process”

During our first year in The Trust Project, we realised that transparency was the common thread running through all of the project's guidelines, the indicators. The editorial teams are being challenged to explain to their readers how stories are created, how they choose topics, how they check sources and how they do their research.

An important step is to evaluate all the ethical and editorial guidelines that journalists must follow in their daily work. These standards are compiled into a Best Practices document, which is the bedrock of our work with The Trust Project. The document is published prominently on our platforms and is accessible from every article.

The Best Practices page also includes a section on how we go about correcting mistakes and background information about Mediahuis Luxembourg

as a publisher, the history of our newspaper, and our main sources of revenue, including government support we receive. Ideally, this will mark the beginning of a dialogue with our readers about the fundamentals of our journalism.

Trust grows only if our journalists consistently apply transparency measures. That is why we train all members of the newsroom in the deontological requirements of The Trust Project, whether during the onboarding process for new hires or later through workshops. We have also enhanced all of our authors' profile pages, designed to help readers assess a journalist's expertise on a particular topic.

We pay special attention to our use of AI. We disclose when and how AI tools have been used to create graphics and how we use AI for article translations. A small but important trust-related feature in the CUE newsroom platform will allow us to label articles so that readers can immediately see whether they are interviews,

opinion pieces or investigative journalism. More importantly, it enables us to make a clearer distinction between commercial and editorial content.

In this quest for transparency, we see an opportunity to regain lost trust or – even better – to strengthen the trust that already exists.

**Roland Arens,**  
senior consultant  
& former editor-in-chief,  
Mediahuis Luxembourg





# Experience over content? How to reach young audiences

At a time when young people feel increasingly disconnected from traditional media, we face a major challenge: how do we engage a new generation with independent journalism? Liesbeth Nizet, Head of Future Audiences Monetization at Mediahuis group, has a clear mission: to reach new, younger audiences – and convince them to pay for journalism.

*Text: Marouscha van de Groep, general reporter, De Telegraaf  
Images: Marcel Molle*

## Different expectations

Young people have grown up in a digital world where news and entertainment are available at any moment. Traditional media struggle to stay relevant. “Young people expect everything to be easy, fast and personal,” Liesbeth explains. “When they book a weekend getaway on Airbnb, it’s done with one click. Yet, with us, subscriptions still sometimes require a bank transfer – it’s like asking them to shop in a store meant for their grandparents. Why not offer Apple Pay? Something that small can make a huge difference.”

Liesbeth believes younger generations approach news consumption differently from older ones. “Why can a platform like Airbnb convince young people to pay for a weekend

trip, but we can’t get them to pay for something as fundamental as independent journalism? That’s something we need to change.”

She says the solution lies in redefining how journalism is presented and monetised. “It’s not just about content; it’s about the experience. Young people need to feel they are part of a community that understands and shares their values.”

## From TikTok to the heart

Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram play a crucial role in building communities today. It’s about more than just being present on these platforms – it’s about earning trust.

“For a long time, our goal was to drive as much traffic as possible to our own platforms, where we could generate revenue through subscriptions and ads,” Liesbeth says. “That worked well for a while, but it’s not how we reach young people. Social media should be a tool to build relationships and eventually guide them toward journalism on our platforms. That must remain the end goal.”

“That means we no longer measure success by traffic alone, but by engagement and interaction. We are exploring this approach through SPIL, Mediahuis’ youth-focused brand. Through our journalistic content on TikTok, we already reach 3 to 4 million young people weekly. They are clearly interested in journalism, if we present it the right way. Journalism remains the core, but we start from the young consumer’s perspective.”

“We no longer measure success with young audiences by traffic but by engagement and interaction”

Liesbeth Nizet





# Young people want to know who is behind a story. Journalists need to be more visible”

Liesbeth Nizet

MAROUSCHA VAN DE GROEP  
& LIESBETH NIZET

## Creator community

A news brand for young people goes beyond traditional news distribution. “We are also considering sustainable advertising models that involve a creator community,” Liesbeth says. “For example, instead of just promoting a new flavour or discount, a soft drink brand could work with this community to share their sustainability initiatives. That aligns perfectly with the values of younger audiences.”

SPIIL is also moving toward a membership model instead of traditional subscriptions. “Young people want to feel like they belong,” Liesbeth says. “We enhance that sense of connection with gamification elements. We’re

exploring options like rewarding frequent app users with ad-free days. The goal is to lower the barrier and make the experience more personal.

“We want to be socially responsible, but not just in a critical way. We want to provide young people with valuable and practical content. Take a topic like personal finance. We could collaborate with an online content creator who specialises in that area to help young people navigate this complex topic. A form of constructive advertising, in other words.”

## Gen Z button

Technology plays a crucial role in this entire story. AI tools, for example,

can help make complex topics more accessible. “A ‘Gen Z button’ is a good example,” says Liesbeth. “Older people often have more prior knowledge of a subject than younger readers. With a button like this, we can bring younger audiences up to speed in just three bullet points on what went right and wrong with Geert Wilders in the Netherlands in the past, for example. This button could also be useful for other target groups.”

Still, Liesbeth emphasises that the human factor remains essential. “Young people want to know who is behind a story. They also love behind-the-scenes content that shows authenticity and even a bit of vulnerability. Journalists need to be more visible and share more of themselves.”

## Reliable news for young thinkers

Mediahuis België launched its youth subscription in 2023, aiming to familiarise young people with newspapers, provide them with reliable information and teach them critical thinking. Initially, we highlighted the low price of €1 per week, but in 2024, we shifted the focus to its editorial value.

With the campaign “unblock the full story”, we emphasised reliability in an era of fake news. We used multiple social media platforms to maximise awareness among our target audience of 18- to 26-year-olds. By collaborating with influencers, content creators and out-of-home channels such as digital screens in Ubers, we found our way into young people’s daily lives.

A strong collaboration emerged between the acquisition team and editorial teams. Young people who engaged with journalistic video content from our brands were also shown commercial offers for the youth subscription.

By the end of 2025, we aim to reach 5,000 youth subscriptions. We are well on our way to that milestone, as we closed 2024 with around 3,000 subscribers. In 2025, we will further invest in job fairs, final-year high school students, video marketing and content creators.

With this integrated approach, Mediahuis België continues to build a generation that values reliable journalism.





## Balancing old and new

Reaching new audiences without losing existing subscribers is another major challenge. “At Mediahuis, we pursue a dual strategy: investing in new formats and audiences while maintaining our core business. It’s not about choosing one over the other, it’s about balance.”

As an example, Liesbeth mentions a Norwegian newspaper that discovered its older male readers were being over-served, while younger readers and women were being left behind.

“They figured this out simply by analysing which articles were read by different age and gender groups. We are now conducting the same analysis for all Mediahuis brands.”

## Feeling at home and heard

The journalism industry can learn from companies like Netflix and Airbnb, but also from pop icons like Harry Styles and Taylor Swift. Their loyal fan bases – the Stylers and the Swifties – prove the power of creating a sense of belonging.

“It’s unrealistic to assume that a 25-year-old will automatically subscribe to a newspaper once they have their own home,” Liesbeth says. “The market works differently today. The key is to build a community where young people feel at home and heard.”

When will SPIL’s – and, by extension, Mediahuis’ – work be considered a success? “When our journalism is not just a reliable source of news, but also a space where young people feel inspired and recognised. A world they see themselves in. We need to meet their need for a sense of belonging.”



Alan Steenson and MET colleagues

## MET Programme: Young talent strengthens newsrooms

Since 2022, the Mediahuis Emerging Talent (MET) programme has aimed to increase diversity in newsrooms, attract talent and create a more versatile development path for young journalists at Mediahuis Ireland. So far, 12 journalists have participated, with four now in permanent positions. Passion for journalism and growth potential were the main selection criteria, while academic qualifications played a much smaller role. This has resulted in a diverse talent pool.

Each participant receives a two-year contract, giving them the opportunity to work across different departments in the Dublin and Belfast newsrooms and specialise in

news, video, audio or sports. One of the programme’s biggest strengths is the time and space they are given to develop under the guidance of experienced mentors. Some young journalists find their path more quickly than others, but everyone gets the chance to grow and learn from their mistakes.

Alan Steenson, Editorial Development Executive at Mediahuis Ireland, leads the MET programme: “These young journalists teach us what resonates with Gen Z, especially on social media. A video by our MET colleague Hannah Daygo recently became our second most popular TikTok video ever, with over 5 million views – more than half from viewers aged 18 to 24. This proves that we can reach young audiences when we provide the right content in the right way.”

## SPIL: Journalism starts with a conversation

SPIL is our journalism platform for a new generation. Why are we launching it? Because news works differently for young people. They don’t want to be passive observers – they want to listen, compare perspectives, react and share their opinions. Young people don’t just want to hear what’s happening; they want to understand how others see it. For them, journalism isn’t a monologue but a dialogue.

That’s why SPIL combines reliable journalism with interaction. Facts remain the foundation, but perspectives complete the picture. Through podcasts, videos and articles, journalists and content creators share the news and their insights. The team behind SPIL is a mix of young creatives and experienced experts. This way, we stay relevant to our audience while leveraging an extensive network and deep expertise to act quickly.

Social media is not an afterthought – it’s the starting point. It’s where young people discover, discuss and share news. Using technology,

we analyse conversations, gather perspectives and enrich our content. Our own SPIL platform serves as an extension of these social media interactions: a place where discussions that start on social platforms are deepened and enriched with new insights. This creates a journalistic ecosystem that evolves with society.

This dynamic approach makes SPIL not only relevant but also sustainable. We monetise the place where our audience is active – on social media – while strengthening that revenue stream through the context and depth offered on our own platform. So we create value across every channel.

We are launching SPIL primarily in the Dutch market, focusing on topics and discussions that matter to young people here.

Curious about SPIL? Follow us on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

[@spilnews](#)  
[@spilnews](#)  
[@spilnews](#)



Jeroen Kroeze of SPIL out in the field

# “It’s unrealistic to assume that a 25-year-old will automatically subscribe to a newspaper once they have their own home”

Liesbeth Nizet



# Zij is van mij: A podcast with unprecedented social impact

Every eight to 10 days, a woman in the Netherlands is killed by her partner or ex-partner. Is such violence abstract? Distant? Something that only happens in other cultures? No – the victim could have been your neighbour. Your sister. Your daughter. Suddenly, these numbers have a face. Suddenly, you start wondering what on earth is going on in the Netherlands.

*Text: Saskia Belleman, court and legal reporter, De Telegraaf*



## Desperate cries for help

As I prepare for my workweek as a court reporter, I comb through the hearing schedules of the 11 district courts and four courts of appeal in our country. Every week, I come across multiple criminal cases where a man is on trial for killing his wife.

A young man who stabbed his wife 200 times shortly after she gave birth, leaving their baby next to her body. A man who chained his wife to a heating pipe. A man who broke down his ex-partner's apartment door in the middle of the night and shot her in the head. A man who strangled his wife and then tried to set her on fire.

These women all had one thing in common: they had ended or wanted to end their relationships. Most had suffered abuse, stalking or threats. And almost all had sought help from the police, social services or the justice system – without success. And then it was too late.

**“We deliberately chose a podcast format because audio doesn't just communicate facts – it conveys emotion and urgency”**

Saskia Belleman

There were so many cases that I had no choice but to dig deeper. My proposal found fertile ground with editor-in-chief Kamran Ullah. I formed a team with podcast producer Marieke Mager, co-host Wilson Boldewijn and experienced talk show editor Kelly Valk. We spoke with experts, police officers, a prosecutor, a forensic psychologist, a professor and lawyers.

But most importantly, we spoke with survivors of attacks by their ex-partners, with the loved ones of women who were no longer able to tell their own stories, and even with a perpetrator who had severely abused two consecutive partners. Fortunately, he hadn't killed them – but, as he admitted, that wasn't thanks to him.

## Illusion of progressive society

These stories deserved more than just statistics and case files. We deliberately chose a podcast format because audio doesn't just communicate facts – it conveys emotion and urgency. The voices of survivors, loved ones and experts add layers of depth that written text alone cannot always capture.

Our investigation made me realise that the belief we live in a progressive, gender-equal country is an illusion. Yes, on paper, men and women have equal opportunities. In reality, women still earn less than men for the same work. Women's health issues are often overlooked because male symptoms are considered the standard. And women who try to report abuse, threats or stalking to police are routinely dismissed with: “Well, ma'am, if he hasn't done anything, there's nothing we can do.”

Not done anything? Abuse, threats and stalking are all criminal offences. There is a deep undercurrent of sexism in our society that results in women not being taken seriously. That is shocking – because it costs a woman her life every eight to 10 days. In fact, femicide claims more victims than organised crime.





SASKIA BELLEMAN

## Giving a voice to an unseen issue

Each strangled, stabbed, shot or beaten woman is treated as an isolated incident. In reality, they are symptoms of a larger pattern of gender inequality in our society.

Even high-profile cases – like that of 16-year-old Hümeýra, who was shot dead by her ex-boyfriend in front of her classmates at her school in Rotterdam – fail to bring real change. That day, she had been due to file her fifth police report against him. I watched as people expressed shock and outrage, as yet another investigation was launched, which – predictably – revealed what had gone wrong. And I watched as that report was placed on top of a pile of previous reports in a desk drawer. Without anything changing.

That is precisely what we exposed in *Zij is van mij* (She Belongs to Me). The eight-episode podcast hit like a bombshell. Suddenly, the term “femicide” was being used in courtrooms. My inbox was flooded with messages from women fearing for their lives, desperately seeking help.

I am not a social worker. I can’t make a difference in that way. But with this podcast, we gave a voice to something that needed to be said. And the microphone proved to be a powerful weapon. Requests for interviews and invitations poured in – from police departments, public prosecutors’ offices, support organisations, mayors and politicians who wanted to hear about our findings.

At first, I thought: This is absurd. You should be telling me how things

work, not the other way around. But I seized the opportunity. Whenever I can, I make time in my workweek to give lectures about femicide. The more attention, the better. Winning a Dutch Podcast Award for *Zij is van mij* helped amplify the message. But we are far from done.

**“The eight-episode podcast hit like a bombshell. Suddenly, the term ‘femicide’ was being used in courtrooms”**

Saskia Belleman

## Auslese: spontaneous literary criticism

Especially in uncertain times, we are drawn to stories: fictional or true stories, stories that take us to fantasy worlds, enrich our knowledge or comfort us. The literature podcast *Auslese* from *Aachener Zeitung* has been providing insights into the contemporary literary world for a year and a half, through the newspaper’s website and on popular podcast platforms.

Once a month, editor-in-chief Thomas Thelen and journalist Andrea Zuleger discuss a novel they select based on previews offered by publishers. The conditions: the novel must be contemporary and the author well-known enough to ensure sufficient reach. With audio manager Peter Engels, Thomas and Andrea spend 20 minutes discussing their reading experience, the author and the themes of the book: love, betrayal, friendship or childhood. At the end of each conversation, they mention a few other new releases.

Thomas and Andrea choose not to discuss the topics of the recording beforehand. In fact, they often don’t even know if the other liked the book. This approach proves successful because it ensures spontaneity and liveliness in the conversation, which is always recorded in one take and edited as little as possible.



## Stem Z: a podcast for and by first-time voters

Belgian politics is a complex beast. For those voting for the first time, the path to the ballot box can sometimes seem overwhelming. In the run-up to the 2024 federal elections, *De Standaard* launched the podcast *Stem Z*, a podcast made for first-time voters, by first-time voters. The goal? To help Generation Z understand Belgian politics and inform them about their rights as voters in an accessible way. And what better way to do that than through a podcast?

Five young journalists from *De Standaard* were given carte blanche and went in search of answers to questions such as: “How do you cast a valid vote?”, “Where can you quickly find reliable information about party positions?” or “How diverse and reliable is Belgian politics?”

The result is a no-nonsense podcast. No fuss, no mansplaining, just clear answers.





## My Father's Murder: gripping true crime

The eight-part true crime podcast 'De moord op mijn vader' (My Father's Murder) tells the true story of the murder of Gerard Meesters. The 52-year-old teacher from Groningen was shot dead in the doorway of his home on 28 November 2002 in a cold-blooded execution by an international drug cartel. Through testimonies from family members, we discover that the victim's sister had become entangled in the cartel. She fled the gang, who went looking for her and ended up at her brother Gerard's house, with fatal consequences.

Dagblad van het Noorden journalists Liselotte Schüren and Jeroen Kelderman provide a unique reconstruction of the brutal murder. They follow the years-long struggle of Gerard's children, Koen and

Annemarie, who have been fighting for justice for more than 20 years. The case came back into the spotlight in November 2024 with the trial of Robert Dawes, a British drug lord suspected by Dutch authorities of ordering the gruesome murder.

De moord op mijn vader not only offers a terrifying look at the devastating impact of organised crime but also tells a powerful story of human resilience and the tireless quest for justice. The result is journalism that touches, informs and connects.

The combination of a compelling narrative style, in-depth investigative journalism by journalist Rob Zijlstra and emotional testimonies resonated massively with listeners. The podcast was listened to more than half a million times within three months of its launch.



## Killing Edgar: the story of a shocking murder

On 7 December 1983, Edgar Graham, a promising young lawyer and unionist politician, was murdered by the IRA at just 29 years old. This shocking crime occurred in broad daylight, leaving a profound impact on Northern Ireland. Edgar Graham was recognised as a brilliant thinker and a potential future leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. Forty years later, Belfast Telegraph journalist Sam McBride brought his story back into focus through a compelling podcast.

The two-part documentary Killing Edgar: The IRA murder of the lawyer Edgar Graham delves into Edgar's life and legacy, and the unresolved questions surrounding his death. Why did the IRA target him? Was he betrayed by a colleague? What political role could he have played in Northern Ireland's future? McBride interviewed Edgar's friends and colleagues, including Dermot Nesbitt, who was standing beside him when

he was shot and who revisited the site of the murder for the first time in the podcast.

Sam McBride: "Podcasting is an intimate medium which resonates with a different audience to those who buy newspapers. The podcast took months of work and navigated legally difficult territory, but some 40 years later it included the vivid recollections of some of those who knew Edgar best – and who demonstrably still mourn the passing of a young academic cut down in cold blood because of his political beliefs."

The podcast is not only a profound piece of journalism but also a tribute to a young academic murdered for his political convictions. The project – which was produced by Ciarán Dunbar with sound design by Graham Davidson – received a Silver Award in the News Documentary/Special category at the New York Radio Awards, where it was also a finalist in the Investigative Report category.





# Our podcasts win awards

Our podcasts have again proven their strength over the past year. With compelling stories and in-depth analysis, our audio journalism has not only engaged listeners but has also received recognition from industry juries. We proudly present an overview of our award-winning podcasts, each reflecting our dedication to quality journalism.



De Telegraaf

**DUTCH PODCAST AWARDS**  
JOURNALISM

Zij is van mij (She Belongs to Me) is an eight-part podcast series that explores the harsh reality behind femicide, or the murder of women.

Creators: Saskia Belleman, Marieke Mager and Wilson Boldewijn



Aachener Zeitung

**PETER BINDER MEDIA PRIZE**  
FOR EFFECTIVE JOURNALISM

What's it like to grow up as a young person in a world that is constantly in crisis? In Mutausburch, we follow four young people from the Aachen region and hear how they have learned to cope with difficult situations, as well as their fears and dreams.

Creators: Jasper Riemann, Amien Idries and Peter Engels



The Bel tel

**NEW YORK FESTIVALS**  
RADIO AWARDS

NEWS DOCUMENTARY, ZILVER

In the two-part series Killing Edgar, journalist Sam McBride revisits the life of Edgar Graham, an Ulster unionist politician and law lecturer who was widely expected to be a future leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. The 29-year-old was shot dead on 7 December 1983 by the IRA at Queen's University in Belfast.

Creator: Sam McBride



The Indo Daily

**NEW YORK FESTIVALS**  
RADIO AWARDS

SERIALIZED PODCAST, BRONZE

The series I'm Not Here to Hurt You from The Indo Daily tells the story of one of Ireland's most prolific bank robbers, John O'Hegarty, dubbed "the polite bank robber" after he held up at least 15 banks in 2004.



nrc>

**DUTCH PODCAST AWARDS**  
DAILY

The daily podcast Vandaag (Today) delivers the story of the day in 20 minutes every weekday, told by NRC's best journalists.

Creators: The NRC Vandaag team



nrc>

**DUTCH PODCAST AWARDS**  
BEST INTERVIEW

Every week in Het Uur (The Hour), host Pieter van der Wielen welcomes a leading guest from a field that is particularly relevant in today's world. How do they view life? What do they see as the key challenges of our time? And what can we learn from them?

Creators: The Het Uur team



De Standaard

**OORKONDES**  
CURRENT AFFAIRS

In the daily podcast DS Vandaag (DS Today), a journalist from De Standaard delves into a single current issue.

Creators: The DS Vandaag team



The Indo Daily

**INMA GLOBAL**  
MEDIA AWARDS  
BEST NEW AUDIO/VOICE  
PRODUCT OR FEATURE,  
HONOURABLE MENTION



The Indo Daily

**JUSTICE MEDIA AWARDS**  
BROADCAST JOURNALISM (PODCAST)

This episode of The Indo Daily podcast covered the story of neighbours who demanded €225,000 in return for not objecting to planning permission for a housing development in a southside Dublin suburb.

Creators: Kevin Doyle, Fionnán Sheahan, Tabitha Monahan and Niall McMonagle





# 5 questions for 2 new editors

Ines Kurschat and Matthew Karnitschnig took on the role of editor-in-chief at Luxemburger Wort and Euractiv, respectively, in 2024. Both face the challenge of making their publications future-proof while staying true to their journalistic mission. How do they view the role of their brand, the digital transformation and engagement with younger audiences? Here they share their vision, ambitions and strategies for the future.



Matthew Karnitschnig,  
editor-in-chief, Euractiv

## 01. What motivated you to become editor-in-chief of Euractiv?

Originally, I was a bit sceptical I was the right person, but the leadership of both Euractiv and Mediahuis were very convincing. The key for me was the challenge of transforming Euractiv, which had been a fairly sleepy news outlet before Mediahuis acquired it, into a formidable force on EU policy. I could see that Mediahuis was committed to the project.

## 02. Which three words best describe your vision of journalism?

Hold power (to) account.

## 03. What is the role of Euractiv in today's rapidly changing world?

Euractiv has an opportunity to become the leading European voice on EU affairs. The goal is for it to be not just one of many voices on EU policy and politics, but the dominant voice, a must-read for people in Brussels and the capitals.

## 04. What makes Euractiv unique?

That we are actually European. Our main competitors are based in the US or are UK-based globalist publications. We are based in Brussels and rooted in Europe with a newsroom of more than 60 journalists from across the continent who speak every European language.

## 05. How will you reach and engage younger audiences?

Europe's youth tends to be much more enthusiastic about the promise of the EU than older generations. We want to harness that enthusiasm with the help of the technologies we can access through Mediahuis to offer them not just content that is relevant to their generation but a user experience that will engage them and keep them coming back for more.



Ines Kurschat,  
editor-in-chief, Luxemburger Wort

## 01. What motivated you to become editor-in-chief of Luxemburger Wort?

Leading the Luxemburger Wort with its 175-year publishing tradition into the digital era as its first female editor-in chief is an honour and a challenge I had to accept. I'm excited to support my colleagues in the newsroom to publish comprehensive stories about and around Luxembourg that readers will find surprising, compelling and reliable. The Wort is the biggest brand in a multilingual integrated newsroom with four other brands, and I'm confident that together we can build meaningful synergies tackling diversified user needs while addressing the particularity of each brand.

## 02. Which three words best describe your vision of journalism?

User-centric, reliable, diverse.

## 03. What is the role of Luxemburger Wort in today's rapidly changing world?

For more than 175 years, the Luxemburger Wort has been the biggest and most important newspaper in Luxembourg. Today, it has taken up the challenge to adapt to the needs of an increasingly digital audience. Digital transformation is about more than a strategy review according to changing reading habits, an updated system landscape and a solid data strategy. Wort journalists strive to respond to diversified user needs and a fast-changing news world with habit- and content-related challenges. Meaning: more compelling storytelling, more exclusive stories, more self-produced cross-media content.

## 04. What makes Luxemburger Wort unique?

The Wort provides information and background stories about all important areas of the multinational and multilingual Luxembourgish society, that are relevant, reliable and relatable. Our stories address multiple perspectives and user needs. Nonetheless, instead of focusing on a full supply of

information, the Wort delivers news stories and background that the reader needs for their everyday life and that help them find their way in an increasingly complex society.

## 05. How will you reach and engage younger audiences?

The Wort has reinforced its presence on social networks such as Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok through providing more video content that explains news, and that is personal and entertaining. The aim is to introduce potential young future readers to the brand. The Wort is also on WhatsApp with an easily accessible and comprehensive news feed for younger people who would like their news on their phone.

We strongly believe we can only attract younger audiences if we are credible. So, our first step towards more credibility will be to prepare our organisation to become more agile, explorative and dynamic from the inside. We've recently created an onboarding process for our new journalists where they can exchange, where they are encouraged to get involved with team projects and where they are empowered to develop their own ideas.





# Crash course for Soros agents



**Beata Balogová is the editor-in-chief of SME, one of the last bastions of independent journalism in Slovakia. The newspaper is part of Petit Press, in which the investment fund Pluralis holds a 34% stake. Under Beata's leadership, SME continues to fight against growing political pressure and disinformation campaigns, while prime minister Robert Fico's government treats independent media as enemies of the state.**

*Text: Beata Balogová, editor-in-chief SME*

## Beware of the watchdog

“Dear progressive liberal media and opposition, sorry that I survived, but I'm back,” Slovak prime minister Robert Fico wrote on Facebook upon returning to office after surviving an assassination attempt. With those words, he unleashed a fresh wave of verbal attacks on independent journalists, whom he previously labelled as “filthy anti-Slovak scum” and “bloodthirsty bastards”.

To Fico, the journalists at my newspaper are nothing more than “a herd of squealing pigs of George Soros”, the Hungarian-American democracy advocate. Verbal attacks from government officials, politicians and armies of online trolls are just one of the many obstacles faced by independent media under a populist government with autocratic tendencies.

Fico sees public media as an extension of the government, meant to report rather than hold

those in power accountable. Since taking office, his administration has followed through on this vision: rewriting laws, ousting the leadership of the public broadcaster and making the new media structure vulnerable to political influence.

As a result, the watchdog role largely falls to independent media like SME. We continue to question those in power, even when the prime minister and his officials refuse to answer questions, withhold data and deny access to basic information.

## Biggest source of fake news

We investigated the disinformation campaign against opposition leader Michal Šimečka and his family. We exposed how Telegram has become a lucrative revenue stream for disinformation spreaders and politicians. We uncovered how charity initiatives were exploited to scam vulnerable families. We reported on the collapse of a major cardiology centre due to local power struggles.

During elections, disasters, conflicts and other major events, the public consistently turns to SME for reliable, fact-based reporting.

Fico has refused to speak with SME for the past 15 years, yet he eagerly granted an interview to Russian propagandist Olga Skabeyeva, who is on international sanctions lists. His government legitimises shady disinformation networks while portraying independent journalists as enemies of the state.

Our approach to combating disinformation has evolved. The biggest source of fake news is now the government itself. We no longer react to every single lie – doing so would only amplify state propaganda. If we allow ourselves to be dragged into an endless reactive mode, we risk losing our role as gatekeepers of the truth.

“During major events,  
the public consistently  
turns to SME for reliable,  
fact-based reporting”

Beata Balogová







“We continue to question those in power, even when they withhold data and deny access to basic information”

Beata Balogová

### Defending against ‘Orbanisation’

It is becoming increasingly difficult to keep the public focused on the most important issues. Every morning, as editor-in-chief, I ask myself: What information do our readers truly need today to make informed decisions?

The challenges we face mirror those that our colleagues in Hungary have been battling for over a decade. Their experience serves as a crash course in resilience against hostile governments. But autocrats also learn from each other, using every tool modern technology provides.

That is why we must discuss our defence strategies – not just in Slovakia, where “Orbanisation” looms, but in all democracies where populist governments seek to undermine press freedom.

### Pluralis helps safeguard independent journalism

The impact investment fund Pluralis was established in 2021 to help safeguard independent journalism and media pluralism in European countries where these are not always guaranteed.

Pluralis brings together a group of European media companies, foundations and impact investors. It is a joint initiative of the New York-based Media Development Investment Fund, the King Baudouin Foundation in Belgium, Tinius Trust in Norway and Mediahuis.

To date, the fund has raised €50 million in financing. Mediahuis currently holds a 19.17% stake.



#### Pluralis investments

  
RZECZPOSPOLITA  
38.62% in Gremi Media, Poland

**TELEGRAM**  
45% in Telegram Media Grupa, Croatia

**SME**  
34% in Petit Press, Slovakia





# From *NEWS* to experience

To compete in this digital era – where everything is vying for consumers’ attention – news brands must add value to their subscriptions. That’s why we are developing a formula that keeps subscribers engaged longer and helps them spend their time meaningfully. Independent journalism remains the foundation, but we are enhancing it with additional services, so a news subscription becomes an experience.

*Text: Suus Ruis, branded content specialist Mediahuis Nederland  
Images: Marcel Molle*

## More than just news

We are taking a major step in transforming subscription models with what we call “the essential subscription”. By offering our readers a broader package of benefits and services, we aim to make a news subscription as essential as a streaming or internet subscription. For example, subscribers to De Standaard and NRC gain access to The New York Times, which has been a significant inspiration for our model.

But it goes beyond just news. Think of exclusive content and products focused on personal

development or relaxation, such as online masterclasses and e-books. Through this richer, more personalised experience, we attract new subscribers and strengthen relationships with existing ones.

“We don’t just want subscribers to spend more time with our content; we also want to ensure that time is well spent,” says Matthijs van de Peppel, Group B2C Strategy Director, who is spearheading the subscription expansion.

The strategy also addresses a phenomenon known as subscription fatigue: too many subscriptions can lead to a sense of overload, as

Marith Zwarts, Director B2C at NRC, explains: “People want to spend their time on what truly matters to them. By adding more value to a single subscription, we make it easier for them to choose ours.”

“We are competing with social media, streaming services and other platforms that increasingly avoid linking to news sites because they want to keep visitors on their own platforms,” Matthijs adds. “We want to maintain a direct relationship with our audience by providing more reasons to visit our apps and websites. This is crucial for our business model.”

MATTHIJS VAN DE PEPEL  
& MARITH ZWARTS





## A three-layered model

The implementation of the new subscription will vary across Mediahuis brands. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach, but the structure remains the same. Independent journalism is at the core – the first layer – featuring in-depth analysis, investigative reports and relevant news stories that inform readers and help them better understand the world.

The second layer provides practical guidance and context for daily life. This is what we call service journalism: tips and advice that address practical questions or needs. This could be explanations of complex topics such as solar panel regulations or personalised recommendations on culture, finance, health or parenting. This helps consumers make better choices and gain more control over multiple aspects of their lives.

The third layer consists of practical and enriching services that add extra value to the subscription. Examples include e-books, walking and cycling routes via RouteYou, puzzles

and masterclasses. This allows subscribers to do more, experience more and learn more. Together, these three layers form a comprehensive and future-proof subscription model that meets the needs of modern consumers.

## Truly understanding the reader

Customisation is a key aspect of our new subscription strategy. Through data analysis and qualitative research, we aim to better understand what subscribers want. This enables us to develop services tailored to specific brands and audiences. De Standaard and NRC provide their subscribers access to The New York Times, while De Standaard, Nieuwsblad, Gazet van Antwerpen, Het Belang van Limburg and De Limburger integrate with RouteYou.

“The identity of our brands and their subscribers is central,” says Marith. “At NRC, everything revolves around depth and analysis, while other titles create a valuable subscription experience in their own unique

ways. Understanding your audience's needs allows you to determine what additional value you can offer them.”

Gaining insight into what subscribers – and potential subscribers – want is crucial, she says. “We have a strong connection with our existing subscribers and invest in understanding the desires and needs of non-subscribers. Our user data provides direction but not ready-made answers. It's up to us to interpret that data intelligently.”

The enriched subscriptions also help Mediahuis remain a destination for consumers. Marith: “We must ensure that people continue visiting our platforms – whether it's for a news article, a podcast, a puzzle or a walking route.”

“Our user data provides direction but not ready-made answers. It's up to us to interpret the data intelligently”

Marith Zwarts



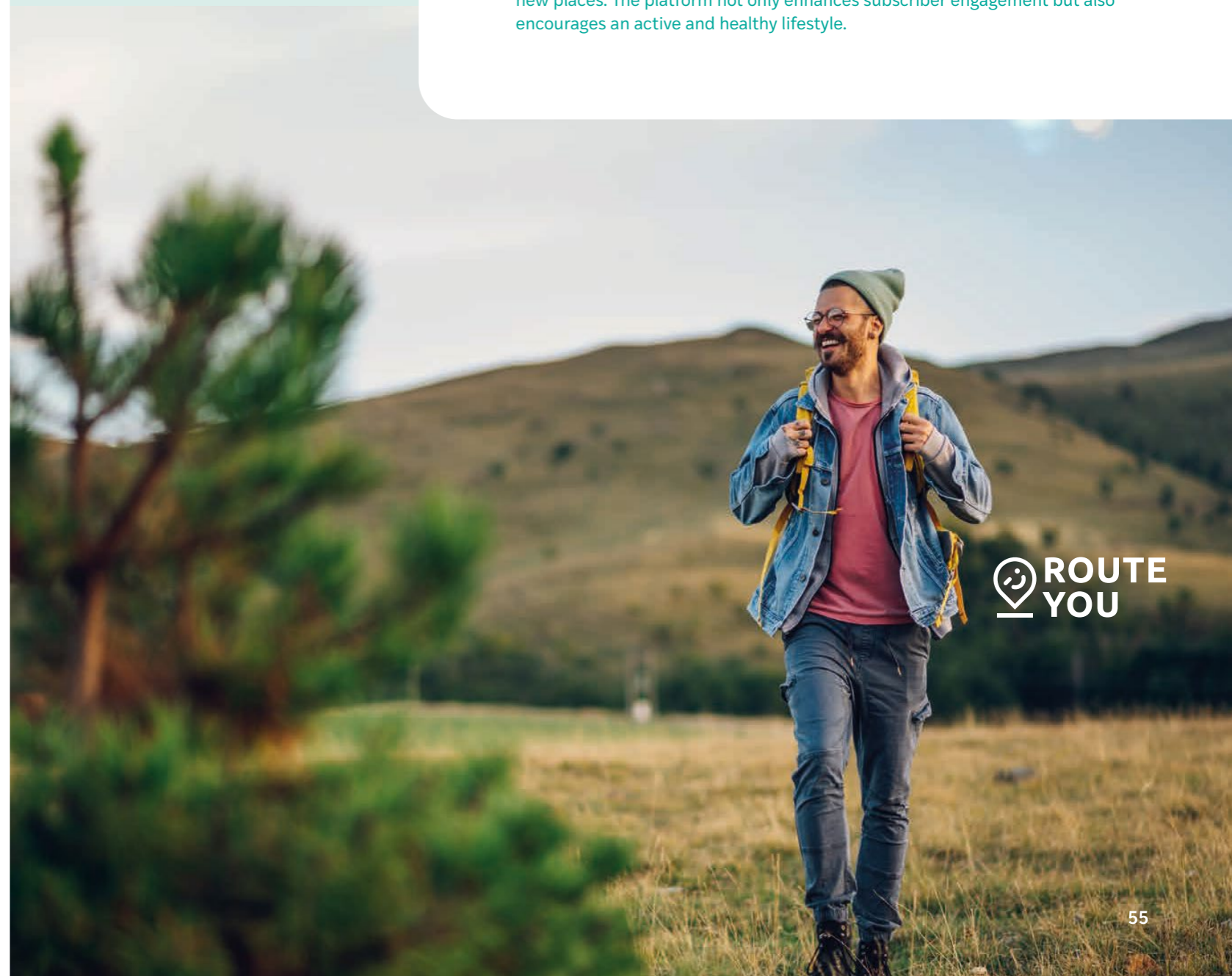
## RouteYou: Millions of cycling and hiking routes for subscribers

In recent years, walking and cycling have surged in popularity as healthy leisure activities. This trend is reflected in the growing demand for recreational navigation apps. Founded in 2005 and now part of Mediahuis, RouteYou is one of the pioneers in this field. With over 10 million routes, 4.5 million points of interest and 15 million unique visitors per year, RouteYou offers an unparalleled combination of inspiration and ease of use.

Subscribers of the Belgian news titles Het Nieuwsblad, De Standaard, Gazet van Antwerpen and Het Belang van Limburg, as well as the Dutch title De Limburger, receive unlimited free access to the paid version of RouteYou. This includes all premium features such as offline navigation, voice instructions and personalised routes. Since last year, they have been able to access these features via the new user-friendly app for iOS and Android.

The integration of RouteYou into the Mediahuis offering goes even further. Newspapers regularly feature articles with walking and cycling tips, and the carefully selected routes can be accessed and saved directly in the RouteYou app – seamlessly connecting reading with real-life experiences.

With RouteYou, Mediahuis invites its readers to get outdoors and discover new places. The platform not only enhances subscriber engagement but also encourages an active and healthy lifestyle.



 ROUTE  
YOU





## Time well spent

Success always comes with challenges. One of them is speed. Due to the complex systems we use across different countries, it can take time to implement new services and technologies. Understanding non-subscribers is also a challenge.

“The millions of visitors who browse our platforms daily without logging in represent enormous potential,”

Matthijs says, “but we often don’t know who they are or exactly what they’re looking for. Here, too, data provides the solution.”

Creating a sustainable and future-proof model for journalism is the ultimate goal. “We want Mediahuis journalism to exist 100 or 200 years from now,” says Matthijs. “That means combining our journalistic mission with a strong focus on revenue generation.”

The new subscription experience is an important step in our evolution as a digital media company. We are not only strengthening our bond with readers but also securing our position in a rapidly changing media landscape. In a world where attention is scarce, everything revolves around “time well spent” – whether through exclusive content, practical extras or in-depth journalism.

“We want Mediahuis journalism to exist 100 or 200 years from now. That means we must also focus on revenue generation”

Matthijs van de Peppel



## Plus: Five newspapers, one subscription

What if we gave our subscribers access not just to their own newspaper but to all of our titles? That’s exactly what we do with Plus – a concept designed to meet readers’ need for broader information and inspiration, without barriers. Since November 2022, subscribers of De Standaard, Het Nieuwsblad, De Gentenaar, Gazet van Antwerpen and Het Belang van Limburg have been able to read the Plus articles from four other Belgian Mediahuis titles free of charge and without limits.

“The launch wasn’t without challenges,” says Koen Meeusen, Sales & Care Director B2C at Mediahuis België. “For example, we initially didn’t have a ‘single sign-on’ solution, meaning users had to log in again for each title to access Plus. That changed in 2024 with the implementation of Auth0, a new login and registration system that streamlines our readers’ and subscribers’ digital access to our news brands.”

The results speak for themselves. Today, Plus accounts for no less than 20% of our pageviews. We’ve also seen a clear increase in reading time: subscribers stay engaged longer and discover more content that interests them. 80% of our subscribers see Plus as added value, and for 40%, it’s even a reason to keep their subscription.

Plus reinforces our ambition to offer an attractive digital package to both current and future subscribers, enriching our journalistic offering.



Scan the code to discover what our colleagues and subscribers think of Plus.

## Irish Independent offers readers valuable insights for a better life

If you subscribe to the Irish Independent, we already know you’ll enjoy our news, sports, lifestyle, and business coverage. But what if subscribing really helped you live a better life?

Service journalism helps you do just that, and over time we have come to see that this is an essential role we fulfil for readers. Whether it’s how to improve your health, how to sort your pension out, or what kind of an electric car you should buy, our readers look to us for expert guidance on the things that are important to them.

We could see, from looking at the data provided by our audience team,

that our readers particularly love the kind of detailed, authoritative personal finance of Charlie Weston and Gabrielle Monaghan, among others. And they also love the kind of stories that let you peep inside someone else’s finances, satisfying a very human need to know how much our neighbours are spending - and earning!

Those insights were the germ for our new Money vertical, with editor Katie Byrne at the helm.

But service journalism isn’t just about money. Think about the health advice dispensed in our popular weekly Stay Well series, or the VoteSmart online election tool, which helped more than 200,000 Irish Independent readers find out which candidates best aligned with their views during the last general election.

Our commitment to increasing the quality and quantity of our service journalism has opened the door to collaborating with other colleagues within the group. Across countries and titles, we exchange insights and ideas on how to make our content more accessible and shareable. Service journalism originally written and produced in Ireland, was also published in the Netherlands and Belgium, and vice versa.

It feels like a brave new world and an exciting one: our ambition is to offer our readers rock solid, expert-led advice in all those areas of their lives where they need a little digout - and to share the learnings with our colleagues along the way.





# Navigating AI disruption as a group

**Artificial intelligence was the hot topic in many living rooms and meeting rooms in 2024. The technology developed rapidly, and consumers willingly embraced AI tools. We can't ignore it, and we don't want to. Driven by the strength of our group, we are working hard on a central technology platform where AI will be key.**

*Text: Peter Soetens, CEO Technology & Product Studio, Mediahuis group  
Images: Kris van Exel*

## External and internal surplus

Technology and product development are essential for the success of Mediahuis. Both are equally important to what we do in journalism and commerce. By bringing technology together within our group and scaling it up, we can better prepare for the future. That's why our Technology & Product Studio (TPS) already has more than 400 colleagues.

AI has entered a disruptive phase. You could see it coming from afar, so at TPS we've been working on it for several years. First, because the technology is crucial for our products – our news sites and apps – and our consumers' user experience. Second, because AI offers opportunities to improve our internal efficiency and automate certain processes.

## AI-driven bias detector

We have already integrated AI technology in our newsrooms, to reduce the workload and provide inspiration to our journalists.

For example, colleagues at De Telegraaf and De Standaard tested NewsSearch in 2024: a kind of internal ChatGPT, to quickly find what our titles have written about a particular topic in the past.

When it comes to generative AI, we are still in the testing and experimental phase. Before we can roll out this technology broadly, we need to iron out the kinks. We already use tools that suggest headlines and summarise articles. With the latter function, our journalists can, for example, shorten an existing long piece into an introduction for a new article, or we can give users the option to read only the summary of an article in the future.

But what our newsrooms do with AI goes much further than that. We measure the degree of bias in our output. For example, how much do we write about men and how much about women? And is that balance right or skewed? This data provides interesting insights that allow us to confidently pursue our mission: delivering balanced, independent journalism.

## NewsSearch, AI tool makes high-quality research faster

With the development of NewsSearch, Mediahuis has taken an innovative step in the digitalisation of journalism. The AI tool – developed by the Mediahuis Technology & Product Studio with Google Cloud and the editorial teams of De Standaard and De Telegraaf – enables journalists to find and process information more quickly and efficiently.

Traditionally, searching for background information and relevant sources takes a lot of time – sometimes hours or even days in the case of in-depth investigations. NewsSearch changes this using advanced AI models that not only search Mediahuis archives but also summarise and verify information. This allows journalists to significantly reduce research time, freeing up more time for analysis and storytelling.

During the test phase, the editorial teams of De Standaard and De Telegraaf immediately experienced tangible benefits. Productivity increased significantly, for example, when compiling biographies and timelines. NewsSearch also provides journalists with new angles, enhancing both the speed and quality of reporting. While previous search solutions were often too limited or rigid, NewsSearch offers the flexibility needed in a dynamic newsroom environment.

Following the successful test phase at De Telegraaf and De Standaard, Mediahuis will roll out NewsSearch more widely across the organisation in 2025.



“Our news brands each assemble their own technology package from the large Lego box”

Peter Soetens





“Standing still is not an option. Everyone must hitch their wagon while the train speeds ahead”

Peter Soetens

## Personalised content

We are also targeting consumers with AI initiatives. We are making great strides, especially in personalisation and subscription acquisition and retention. And when we have tools that have proven themselves in the newsrooms, we want to eventually offer them to our users.

For example, we could give users the choice of how they want to consume an article. It could be the usual full article, a video variant or an audio version using text-to-speech. Or a summary via the tool we already use in our newsrooms. We will be able to generate all these versions in the background using AI.

## High-speed train

Both our journalists and users benefit from our central technological platform. The group structure of Mediahuis is a huge asset in this development, as it means our more than 30 news brands don't all have to reinvent the wheel. We develop our applications centrally, in close collaboration with the various entities and titles, and then make them available to everyone within the group. This way, all our titles can progress.

To achieve economies of scale, you need a common foundation. However, flexibility remains paramount. Our news brands can each assemble their own technology package from the large Lego box. Each title builds its own house and always retains its identity.

By 2026, all brands must be connected to our central technology platform. Not all Mediahuis technology will be on that one platform by then, but a significant part linked to our products and newsrooms will be. Most Dutch and Belgian news brands are already

connected, as are the German and Luxembourgish ones. Ireland is up next in 2025. Standing still is not an option. The idea is that everyone hitches their wagon while the train speeds ahead.

## Waiting for clear rules

Big Tech companies like Google, Microsoft and Meta, as well as AI specialists like OpenAI and Anthropic, have an ambiguous role in this story. They are both partners and competitors. We are therefore seeking the right balance between cooperation and protecting our interests. Protecting the value and integrity of our journalism remains the primary concern in our dealings with Big Tech players.

For example, we have decided to block large language model crawlers from our news sites as much as possible. These crawlers dig up our articles and use them to train their models. Our strength as an international group allows us to engage in dialogue with these parties. However, the ultimate solution probably lies in strong European regulation.

## Fact vs fiction

The rapid evolution of AI offers enormous opportunities, but everyone now realises that there are also significant dangers. Distinguishing fact from fiction is becoming increasingly difficult, and that includes in our newsrooms.

But there are tools to help our journalists with that. Under no circumstances should artificial intelligence undermine our credibility. Trust in our journalism is crucial for our brands.

Will our news brands remain the destination of choice for consumers? Will young people also find their way to our platforms? It is important that we are prepared for different scenarios. We can accelerate or slow down developments. For example, if people start using AI assistants to gather news, we will adjust our products accordingly. Even in that scenario, our journalism must continue to play a societal role.

## New website and app for De Limburger via CUE

CUE is Mediahuis' editorial platform that helps newsrooms work digitally, mobile-first and collaboratively. The platform offers a flexible toolbox for creating news articles, feature stories, opinion pieces, interviews and other content. It also integrates podcasts, videos and visual stories. The mission of CUE is clear: to create an excellent mobile-first user experience for our customers and a best-in-class digital-first experience for our journalists. The platform allows newsrooms to decide how they present their content, with the freedom to personalise it based on their readers' needs.

Every feature developed for a specific Mediahuis title is instantly available to all other brands within the group through CUE. The platform is already in use by our news

brands in Luxembourg and Aachen and the regional titles of Mediahuis Nederland. At the end of 2024, De Limburger also transitioned to the new system, launching a redesigned website and app. Belgian titles will follow in 2025.

De Limburger's new site and app introduce numerous improvements for users: a better search function, the ability to access author information and personalised content recommendations. Readers can select their region and favourite topics to create localised and personalised news feeds and push notifications. Visual enhancements provide a better reading experience, with new labels and an option to adjust font size. Our newsrooms benefit from simplified workflows and faster publication times.





# The *consumer* in **control**

Focus on a personalised news experience



JESSICA BULTHÉ &  
HAN-MENNO DEPEWEG



**In a world where screen time is a precious commodity, Mediahuis is fully committed to a personalised news experience. Readers should not only be presented with the right content but also feel a real connection with their news platform. “The journalism remains untouched, but the way we offer it to our readers is evolving,” say Han-Menno Depeweg, Chief Digital Officer, and Jessica Bulthé, Chief Data & Insights Officer at Mediahuis group.**

*Text: Jelle Vereecke  
Images: Ron Machielse*

## Relevant for everyone

The battle for the reader’s attention is being fought on multiple fronts. “We’re competing not only with other news media but also with social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok,” says Jessica. “They use smart algorithms to ensure their content seamlessly fits the world of their target audience. We want our readers to experience the same sense of recognition and relevance with the Mediahuis titles, without ending up in bubbles.”

That’s why Mediahuis is focusing on a more intuitive and personalised news experience. “The user should feel like they are in control,” says Han-Menno. “Through a family subscription, for example, where each family member receives the stories most relevant to them based on a personal profile and their own interests. Or by offering articles in different ways: a short summary for those with little time, an in-depth analysis for others, or even a narrated version. It’s all made possible by AI technology.”

## Building on solid foundations

The vision of a more personalised news experience is not just a future goal but a strategic direction that Mediahuis has been developing for some time. In recent years, we have laid crucial foundations to make this vision a reality.

Han-Menno: “We have developed a scalable app architecture based on a central technology platform, enabling personalisation across all our titles. By developing this at group level, each title doesn’t have to do it separately. This is cost- and time-efficient and ensures that the reader gets the same intuitive, relevant and personalised experience with every Mediahuis title.”

In addition to technical infrastructure, Mediahuis has also invested heavily in data science and large language models. “We have been focusing on data maturity for some time and are now at the point of bringing innovations directly to the user,” explains Jessica.





“With the consumer data we have collected online and offline, all very GDPR-compliant, we will soon be able to offer very personal suggestions. If we know that someone is only online with us for 10 minutes in the morning, we can offer a quick news summary. If we notice that someone listens to podcasts between 8.00 and 9.00, we can use a push notification to suggest they listen to tailored articles on the way to work. An app like Waze does the same based on your driving behaviour.”

## View beyond the bubble

“Personalisation doesn’t necessarily mean that an algorithm decides what you do and don’t get to see, like on Facebook and TikTok,” she emphasises. “Our journalism remains independent of algorithms and is carefully curated by our editors. You get suggestions based on your interests, but our journalists still decide what content they present and how it looks.”

Han-Menno: “Personalisation is not only in the content but also in the technology. We could grey out articles you’ve already read, take content that closely matches your interests and make it larger... But we can also give readers the option to request additional context via a ChatGPT-like chatbot or a summary

of past articles if you haven’t followed the news for a few days. Not everyone needs in-depth articles every day, but everyone needs news that is relevant and clear.

**“Personalisation doesn’t necessarily mean that an algorithm decides what you do and don’t get to see”**

Jessica Bulthé

“Suppose you read about the war in Gaza and want to know what exactly happened on 7 October 2023. With one click, you get a short summary that updates you. Or maybe you want a broader perspective: how does NRC view this topic? And how does De Telegraaf? Or a regional title like Gazet van Antwerpen? This way, we get readers out of their bubble and give them a more multi-faceted view of current events.”

In addition, news is becoming increasingly interactive and adaptable. “Readers are getting more control over how they consume news,” says Jessica. “They can set preferred themes, mark important articles for later and fine-tune notifications so they only receive alerts that really matter to them. News is no longer a one-size-fits-all product but a dynamic experience that adapts to the user’s needs and pace.”

## News for everyone

With the personalised experience, Mediahuis also wants to reach new target groups. “Not only young people who often consume news via social media today but also, for example, non-native speakers,” says Jessica. “In Belgium or Luxembourg, it is a huge added value if you can switch between the common languages with one click.”

Han-Menno adds: “Older people also remain engaged longer if they can adjust their reading experience: larger text, an adapted layout, a read-aloud function. This is not just about technology. It’s about everyone feeling at home in our news environment.”

The technology may be the means but the goal remains clear: “Strong, independent journalism that feels familiar,” concludes Jessica. “The right content, at the right time, in a way that suits you. That’s what we’re working towards.”

**“This is not just about technology. It’s about everyone feeling at home in our news environment”**

Han-Menno Depeweg







# 5 young colleagues on working and growing at Mediahuis

What do young employees need from an employer like Mediahuis? And what does Mediahuis do to promote inclusion, mental well-being and career opportunities? Our Chief Human Resources Officer, Martine Vandezande, treated Nadira, Michiel, Noa, Melvin and Lisa to coffee, mint tea and cake in an Amsterdam café. In return, the five young talents shared their candid opinions on four thought-provoking statements.

*Text: Daphne Douwes, journalist Sikkom and Dagblad van het Noorden*

*Images: Marcel Molle*



## Nadira Noldus

Social media editor  
De Limburger

“Without understanding and good collaboration, diversity in your organisation is meaningless”



## Noa van den Dool

Employer branding & communications specialist  
Mediahuis Nederland

“Even if you’re not a manager, you need to show leadership: offering solutions, making decisions”



## Lisa Schetgen

Data Scientist  
Technology & Product Studio

“It’s important to have people believe in you and give you a push. Without that support, you won’t get far”



## Michiel Neskens

Journalist  
Het Belang van Limburg

“Leadership is something you have or you don’t. If it’s forced upon you, you can never truly be yourself”



## Melvin Sturm

Journalist Culy.nl  
Mediahuis Nederland

“The great strength of young people is their openness and courage to break taboos”



## Martine Vandezande

Chief Human Resources Officer  
Mediahuis group

“If I’d been hired just because I’m a woman, I would find that very frustrating”





## Statement 1

### Diversity automatically leads to better performance

The first proposition is put on the table. The immediate question: what does diversity actually mean? It quickly becomes clear that it's a complex patchwork: variety in age, gender, background, culture, education, religion, political views and sexual orientation. But it also includes neurodiversity, such as ADHD or autism.

Everyone around the table agrees that diversity doesn't automatically lead to better performance. "There are several ingredients needed to make diversity work," says Nadira. "Understanding and good collaboration are just as important. Without them, you have nothing."

Melvin emphasises the importance of diversity in journalism. "It's good to hear different people's perspectives sometimes. It helps you select topics and contributes to the work atmosphere, and a diverse company or department makes different decisions." A more diverse newsroom can also help attract younger audiences. "Traditional media don't have the best reputation among young people," Melvin says. "If you want to reach new audiences, you need to make sure they can identify with the creators."

How do you ensure an inclusive company? Martine raises the question, mentioning quotas as a possible answer. "But if I had been hired just because I'm a woman, I'd find that frustrating," she says. Noa, however, believes quotas are necessary. "Mediahuis has had years to become more diverse, but it remains a challenge. Implementing quotas is worth trying."

Melvin also advocates for a cultural shift. "Sometimes, you need something like a quota to break habits and initiate change. If someone gets a slight advantage in hiring because they're a woman, that's not necessarily a bad thing." Michiel agrees. "But does diversity automatically improve performance? No. It helps, but a company can still fail, even if it's diverse."



## Statement 2

### Employees are responsible for their own careers

Nadira fully agrees with this second statement. She believes people are in charge of their own careers. "If you show initiative and indicate how you want to grow, managers often respond positively. I've noticed that it's really appreciated when I say, 'I'd like to try this'. Or if I want to learn something new, they think about how to make it happen."

Noa agrees that speaking up is important. "But if an organisation wants its employees to excel, it has to offer enough training and learning opportunities and ensure people find the right roles within the company."

"You're dependent on colleagues in your career," Lisa adds. "Expressing your ambitions isn't a guarantee of career development. You can still hit a wall. It's important to have people believe in you and give you a push. You won't get there without that support."

"For my generation, the next step always meant moving up," Martine says. "Like a Christmas tree that you climb up." Her younger colleagues see it differently. A successful career is about finding a role that suits you and brings you joy. Expanding and deepening your expertise can be just as valuable. "I'm not sure if leadership roles are my goal," says Michiel. "I love writing, so I don't want to give that up for a managerial position for now."

Martine understands. Autonomy is important. Having the freedom to shape your job in a way that brings satisfaction and passion.





### Statement 3

## Your employer should safeguard your mental health

Martine notes that attention to mental well-being has grown steadily over her 35-year career. “I think it’s very important. That’s why Mediahuis invests in this topic. We focus on prevention, offering training for managers and employees to recognise the signs of burnout, for instance.”

Her younger colleagues believe employers should facilitate open conversations and create a safe environment where people feel comfortable sharing. While they acknowledge Mediahuis’ efforts, they see room for improvement. “Talking about mental health and burnout is still difficult for older generations, so they often dismiss it,” Nadira says.

Melvin defends his colleagues. “I get that they aren’t used to discussing these sorts of things. It’s up to our

generation at Mediahuis to change that. As young people, we bring openness and the courage to break taboos. That’s one of our great strengths.”

Lisa wonders whether it’s a generational issue or more about individual personalities. “It’s not just younger colleagues who show concern for my mental well-being. When I’m under pressure, say, the boomers step in to help, and they’re not all managers.”

Noa: “It’s your responsibility as a leader to ensure workloads remain manageable. If it’s structurally too much and everyone is burned out, that’s a problem.”

Martine agrees that preventing stress and burnout is definitely an employer’s responsibility. “Talking to each other regularly can help, although it’s different from talking to a therapist. As an employer there is little you can do about personal situations, but you can show understanding and give your employee the space they need.”

### Statement 4

## You should develop leadership skills, regardless of your role

For Lisa, the best leaders aren’t necessarily hierarchical managers but colleagues who stand by her: “They’ve already pushed me a lot.” Noa, meanwhile, believes a certain amount of leadership is essential for growth and achieving your goals.

“Setting boundaries and saying no is also a form of leadership,” she says. “The things you have to do as a manager, you sometimes also have to do as a non-manager: propose solutions, take decisions.” Nadira adds: “In a generation where many young people have difficulty setting boundaries, this is especially important.”

Michiel believes leadership isn’t for everyone. “Some people prefer to be led. And not every role requires

leadership. If leadership is forced upon you, you can’t truly be yourself. It’s important to discover who you really are and where you want to go.”

The colleagues agree: leadership is more than just being a manager. It’s about taking responsibility, making decisions and showing initiative. Being assertive and being a role model for others. Or as Martine puts it: “Being a kind of influencer in the workplace.”

Lisa, Nadira, Noa, Melvin, Martine and Michiel, with journalist Daphne Douwes





# Shaping the future of media, together

At Mediahuis, we believe in the power of collaborating and connecting. That's why we bring together colleagues from different countries, entities and departments to exchange ideas, learn from one another and gain new insights. Whether through inspiring knowledge sessions, engaging workshops or informal networking moments, these encounters strengthen our shared mission and culture.

On this page, we look back at some of last year's highlights: moments when we came together as one Mediahuis team to grow, inspire and shape the future of media.



## Mediahuis Group United

Mediahuis Group United is the annual strategic gathering where the group's senior management explores the path towards 2030. With inspiring speakers and networking opportunities, we work together towards a sustainable future for Mediahuis.

## Festival of Journalism

The Festival of Journalism is the ultimate opportunity for Mediahuis journalists, data experts, designers, photo editors and other colleagues to learn with and from each other. This year we celebrated journalism with international speakers such as Sally Lehrman from the Trust Project and Christiaan Triebert from The New York Times, complemented by interactive sessions and workshops led by internal experts.



## Queen of Subscriptions Summit

We all face similar challenges across our different consumer markets. That's why, once a year, we bring together all our B2C colleagues for the Queen of Subscriptions Summit. We discuss our shared B2C strategy for the coming years and offer workshops on topics such as smart pricing, value creation for subscribers, customer service and connecting with Gen Z.

## Mediahuis Trust Hub

Because we believe that reader trust is essential, we created the Mediahuis Trust Hub: a forum where our editors-in-chief meet and develop initiatives to strengthen trust in our news brands.



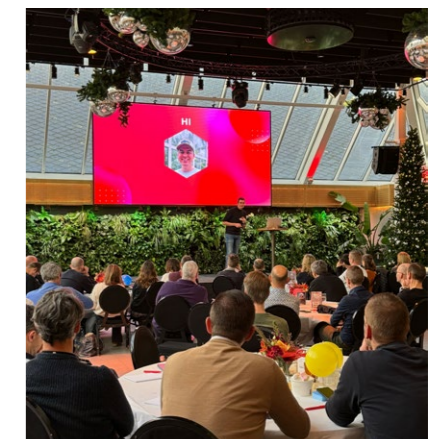
## Young Mediahuis

Young Mediahuis organises inspiring and interactive events for young Mediahuis professionals, from networking drinks and lectures to cultural activities. The highlight is the annual trip, where we visit companies and exchange knowledge in an international setting.



## Data Enthusiast Day

The annual Data Enthusiast Day brings together data experts from all Mediahuis entities to explore the latest trends and developments. Through keynotes, breakout sessions and workshops, we dive deeper into data analysis and the future of data in the media sector.



## TPS United

At TPS United, Mediahuis' technology department looks back on the past year and ahead to the challenges of the coming year. With guest speakers and plenty of networking opportunities, we strengthen collaboration within TPS.



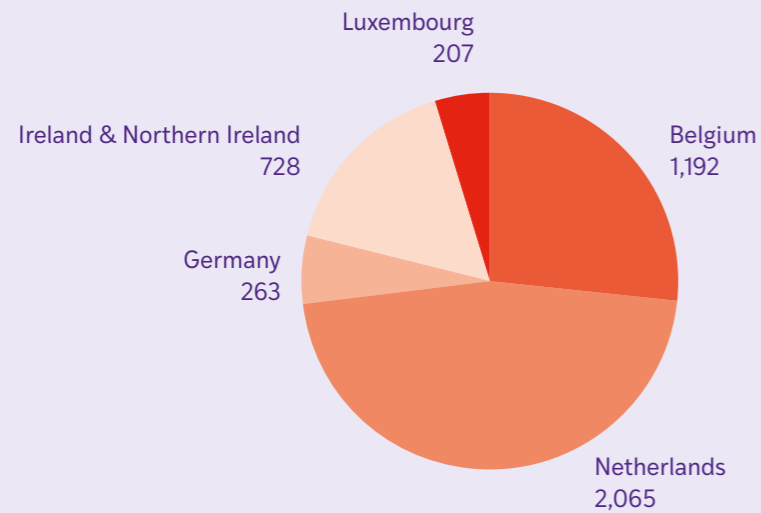


# Talent report 2024

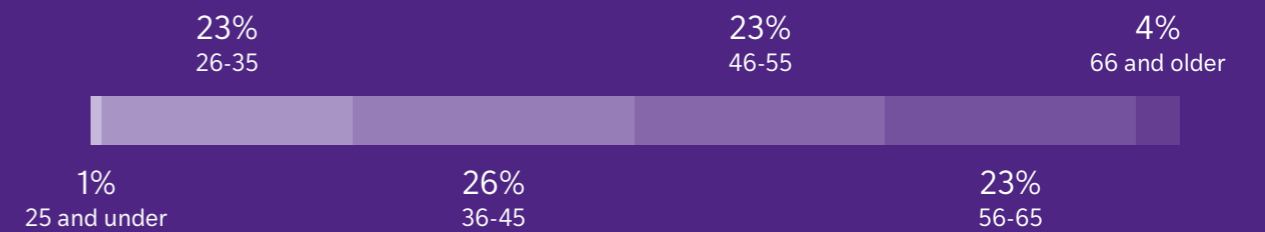
Mediahuis is committed to an inclusive work environment where everyone has equal opportunities and talent can develop to its full potential. Attracting young talent and promoting a balanced gender distribution at all levels within the organisation are key focus areas.



**4,455 employees**



## Age range





*“Radio is a mass medium and radio advertising is still very effective”*



After acquiring new radio stations and the FM auction in 2023, we built the overarching organisation Mediahuis Radio in 2024. You can take that literally, because the finishing touches are being made to studios at “Radioplein” in Amsterdam as we speak with Tom Klerkx, CEO of Mediahuis Radio, and Boaz Shkolnik, Director B2B at Mediahuis Nederland.

*Text: Maarten Hafkamp,  
media journalist Adformatie*

*Images: Marcel Molle*

**TOM KLERKX  
& BOAZ SHKOLNIK**



**First, let's go back to 2023: what do you remember from that hectic year?**

Tom: "First, there was the rush towards the FM auction. We absolutely wanted to focus on radio, but in the Netherlands we only had Sublime. So we had to look at acquisitions. We found them in RadioCorp, with 100%NL, SLAM! and SUNLITE, and Radio Veronica from Talpa Network. The FM auction itself was the most stressful period in my professional life. An auction like that lasts almost a week with 135 rounds, and you constantly wonder: will we make it?"

"We secured two national FM frequencies: for 100%NL and Radio Veronica. We then quickly brought all the radio activities together. First temporarily from the RadioCorp building in Naarden and eventually permanently here at Basisweg in Amsterdam. We had to merge various companies, each with their own culture. It was essentially a start-up within a corporate environment and it was a real challenge to align everything."

**Why did you want to add radio to the portfolio in the Netherlands?**

Tom: "Radio still reaches a lot of people. It's a mass medium. About 80 to 85% of people listen to the radio. I often hear that young people no longer listen to the radio, but 25% of their audio consumption is still radio. I think that's quite a lot."

"As an investment, radio is also interesting due to its clear cost structure and a straightforward revenue model: adverts. Your market share equals a certain revenue, it's that simple. Radio advertising also remains very effective. Mediahuis is not in television, so the potential large reach of radio greatly enhances our other activities. Radio is also a medium that you can offer on all possible carriers."

**You've expanded the core target group from 20-49 to 20-59. Why is that?**

Tom: "It's to do with life stages. Many people still listen to the radio, but that group is getting older. So it's much more relevant to extend it to 59. With One Media Sales (OMS), we conducted studies and made a recommendation to Audify, the marketing organisation for audio."

**Are you reaching the desired target groups?**

Tom: "We have brands that don't need to compete with each other. We have Radio Veronica with a clear profile: classics, but also some new music, for a more male audience. 100%NL is more focused on women. And then you have SLAM! for young people. With that, we cover the target groups we want to engage."

**And do you engage those listeners in the right way?**

Tom: "2024 was a difficult year because the number of listeners fell. But from June, we felt traction, and now, at the beginning of 2025, we are clearly on the right track. 100%NL and SLAM! were on that track from the start. Radio Veronica was a challenge, but the station has existed since 1968 and has had so many incarnations. Everyone has an opinion about it and what it should represent now. Ultimately, it became 'the club feeling'."

**Well-known DJs like Gerard Ekdorf are still important, aren't they?**

Tom: "People like familiar voices that provide reassurance. Radio is also a community. People like to belong somewhere, hence the principle of 'join the club' at Veronica. That also applies to the people who make

radio. They're people the listener would like to be friends with."

**Radio is easier than ever to listen to, given all the digital options. How are you harnessing these possibilities?**

Tom: "The basic premise is that you want to be where your listener is. And then you just have to make sure you have no technical issues. We're working on that with the entire sector because ultimately, we all have the same goal: that the transition to digital listening goes smoothly."

**Drive time - hours spent in the car on weekdays - is still very important, isn't it?**

Tom: "That's right. The future will show what the preferred way of listening will be. FM is still dominant now, but I think DAB+ will become the standard in the car. In Belgium, people listen to DAB+ in the car much more than in the Netherlands. European regulations require DAB+ in new cars, but the fleet in the Netherlands is much older than in Belgium,

**How does the integration of Mediahuis Radio look now?**

Tom: "All the pieces of the puzzle are there, but they don't quite fit yet. Streamlining our processes and integrating people until they are really at full strength takes some time. For example, we decided to combine advertising sales with Mediahuis Nederland. That started in October, but it takes a while for everything and everyone to be in the right place."

**Are you looking at expanding the portfolio? Another FM station, for example?**

Tom: "I think we should first develop what we have and then we'll see. Digitally, you could expand, but preferably from the existing brands. For example, we just started the

**"All the pieces of the puzzle are there, but they don't quite fit yet. Streamlining processes and integrating people takes time"**

Tom Klerkx

theme station Goud van Oud from Radio Veronica. And SUNLITE was on DAB+, but is now only available online."

**Then there is the commercial side, which Mediahuis Radio has chosen to do with Mediahuis Nederland. Boaz, can you explain this strategic choice?**

Boaz: "Mediahuis has bought various media companies in the Netherlands in recent years and has become the leading audio publisher with Audiohuis. We had six advertising sales desks, and that was very inefficient. In 2024, we brought those desks together, starting with podcast and radio sales."

"At the beginning of 2025, we merged Mediahuis Noord, Mediahuis Limburg and Mediahuis Nederland into one organisation. We also wanted to convert all those different desks into one department, one face, one direction and one point of contact for the market. So we offer our advertisers the full cross-media portfolio through one desk."

"We also used the opportunity to put Mediahuis back on the map with our new cross-media proposition, Mediahuis Raakt: words that touch, sound that resonates and images that stay with you."



TOM KLERKX



**You also added Mediahuis Radio with the move in October 2024?**

Boaz: “That’s right. We believe that cross-pollination occurs when you bring sales colleagues close together. In terms of knowledge, but also in sharing sales opportunities and developing propositions. At the same time, we are working hard to offer audio in the broadest sense with print, display and video as a true cross-media proposition in the market. Advertisers can reach their target groups more effectively and on a larger scale with their campaigns, at different times of the day and on different platforms.”

**What effect has that had for your sales organisation?**

Boaz: “Not much, except that we have more sales capacity and can serve more customers with a richer portfolio of brands and advertising opportunities. The customer portfolio of radio sales is complementary to that of Mediahuis Nederland. This enriches our service in both directions. Radio advertisers can increase their reach with the Mediahuis Nederland network, and Mediahuis Nederland customers have access to the possibilities and reach of the radio stations. It’s a win-win.”



BOAZ SHKOLNIK

“We are working hard to offer audio with print, display and video as a true cross-media proposition”

Boaz Shkolnik

**Mediahuis Radio has a collaboration with Talpa Network in OMS. Recently, this was expanded to podcasts. How does that collaboration work?**

Boaz: “Mediahuis is a shareholder of OMS, which bundles the radio spot sales of Mediahuis’ portfolio with those of Talpa Network’s radio stations, so advertisers can buy their radio campaigns on a large scale. Eighty percent of our joint revenue comes from traditional spot sales. Due to television inflation, lots of budgets are being shifted from television to radio. As a result, demand is often greater than our supply.

“With Audiohuis, Mediahuis has one of the largest podcast networks in the Netherlands, and there is still advertising space in digital audio. That’s why we looked at the possibility of placing spots intended for radio on the Audiohuis podcast network. This is unique on this scale in the Dutch market.”

**The advertising market for podcasts is still quite young. How do you see it developing?**

Boaz: “The landscape is fragmented, with many podcasts, often with limited reach. But if you bundle them within one network, it becomes interesting for advertisers. That’s

exactly what makes Audiohuis so strong: with our total portfolio, we create the scale the market is looking for to make an impact with audio campaigns.”

On their hopes for 2025, both Tom and Boaz say they intend to continue the growth of the radio stations and relationships with advertisers. In the advertising industry, audio is the growth market of the moment, so there is every chance to realise those ambitions.

**Mediahuis group radio portfolio**

**Belgium**



**Netherlands**



**Luxembourg**





# Making clear choices: investing in the DNA of Mediahuis

At Mediahuis, we strongly believe in the power of diversification as the foundation for a sustainable business model. That's why our recent investments have been spread across a wide range of areas.

Text: Paul Verwilt, COO Mediahuis group  
Image: Frederik Beyens

## Investments on three fronts

Acquisitions that strengthen our news operations have long been our primary investment path. Examples include the European news brand Euractiv and the addition of several Dutch radio stations to our portfolio in 2023. Our acquisition of RouteYou, a platform for walking and cycling routes that we fully integrated in 2024, also fits within this strategy. This allows us to offer our subscribers additional services that align with their interests.

In addition, we are focusing on marketplaces, a domain where we see strong growth potential. In 2024, for example, we invested in the German company WorkerHero, which aims to address the shortage of skilled labour. We also invested in the Swedish platform Impactpool, which helps organisations that contribute to sustainable development to attract top talent.

Finally, our investments in recent years have also targeted innovative

scale-ups in education and HR technology. In 2024, we expanded our portfolio with an investment in the Swiss company Taskbase, which develops AI applications for education

## Refining where needed

Responsible leadership of a company needs regular review and adjustments to an investment strategy where necessary. That's why we asked ourselves a crucial question last year: Is our focus too broad? Because investing doesn't just require capital – it also demands management capacity and strategic focus.

Our analysis led to a clear conclusion: we must focus on what truly defines Mediahuis. So we continue to invest fully in news brands, including new brands in new markets, as well as in activities that strengthen our existing news operations. We are also committed to marketplaces, as they allow us to independently connect consumers with services such as jobs, housing, cars and insurance.

However, we have decided to discontinue further investments in education and HR technology. These sectors are further removed from our core activities, and we found it challenging to secure a controlling position within a venturing strategy – something essential for creating real impact.

Reliable journalism and strong marketplaces will therefore be the clear focus points for our investments in the coming years. We will continue to look internationally for companies that strengthen these pillars and expand our reach, including among younger audiences. While we will continue to support our existing investments in education and HR technology where possible, we will not expand them. This targeted approach means we ensure that Mediahuis remains strong and ready for the future.



“Reliable journalism and strong marketplaces will be the clear focus points for our investments”

Paul Verwilt





## The growing importance of Marketplaces

# “The quality of our revenue is high”

The role of Marketplaces is becoming increasingly prominent within our group. This fascinating sector has many success stories and challenges. And who better to talk about it than CEO Xavier van Leeuwe? The force behind this branch of Mediahuis shares his vision for the future of Marketplaces, in which he aims to increase the company's profitability further.

*Text: Tjerk de Vries, content director Mediahuis Nederland*

*Images: Marcel Molle*

### Quickly doubling

“Mediahuis in miniature”, that's how Xavier van Leeuwe describes Marketplaces, which has now realized eight participations and five acquisitions to reach 25 brands in eight countries. The investments are mainly focused on what he calls “beer-drinking countries”: Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Finland and Sweden. The marketplaces are divided into four core sectors: housing, comparison sites, cars and jobs.

While Xavier calls Marketplaces “Mediahuis in miniature” for now, he has grand plans: “The profitability of Mediahuis Marketplaces in 2024 is 2.5 times greater than in 2020, and in the coming years we're aiming to double that again.”

The essence is connecting supply and demand. “We already know that from the newspapers,” says Xavier. “For example, the ads on the Speurders platform or the classifieds. That's all digitised now. Mediahuis has made quite a few acquisitions in recent years, and many of those companies had one or more marketplaces. They have been brought together under one roof, and I've been given the key.”

### Evergreens & rising stars

Why does a media company choose to invest in marketplaces? Xavier is clear: “We don't want to put all our eggs in one basket. We want to spread risk, or, to use a fancier word: diversify. Then you are less dependent on trends in

subscriptions and advertisements. Moreover, we have a historical position in marketplaces from the newspaper. What we are doing now is specialising more and more in it.”

The Mediahuis Marketplaces portfolio consists of 17 evergreens and eight winners of the future, as Xavier describes them. “Those evergreens are already profitable and almost all show revenue growth. In addition, we invest in start-ups that we strongly believe in. We want to create a self-fulfilling effect: a lot of supply attracts many consumers, which in turn attracts more business customers, who then put more supply online. In addition, we want to continuously improve the service for real estate agents, recruiters and dealers, to make their lives easier.”

XAVIER VAN LEEUWE  
& TJERK DE VRIES

“Our profit was 2.5 times greater in 2024 than in 2020. In the coming years, we want to double it again”

Xavier van Leeuwe





The profitability of Marketplaces is almost 10% of Mediahuis' profit. "More and more people are joining us," says Xavier with pride. "This lays a solid financial foundation for Mediahuis. The quality of the revenue is high; we even have a platform that achieves a 50% return! I feel the responsibility to keep Mediahuis healthy, even the day after tomorrow. Mediahuis Marketplaces is there to increase profitability in the long term."

## Not a trophy but a licence

In 2024, Mediahuis Marketplaces successfully integrated a series of important acquisitions. "You could see an acquisition as a hunting trophy that you proudly hang on the wall, but I see it more as a hunting licence. The integration within Mediahuis is when it really starts."

Even with trophies in hand, Xavier isn't resting on his laurels. "Everyone wants a piece of the pie. In our industry, there are three types of brands: the leaders, the challengers and the winners of the future. Well-known leaders are the likes of Funda, Immoweb and Indeed. There is hardly any real estate agent or recruiter who doesn't use them. We are mainly among the challengers, so we have to be smart to grow into leadership. That means we have to work even harder."



“A small acquisition is as much work as a large one. So you might as well go for the big acquisitions”

Xavier van Leeuwe

banen<sup>rijk</sup>limburg<sup>o</sup>

## BanenrijkLimburg: extra recruitment power in the southern Netherlands

With the recent acquisition of BanenrijkLimburg, Mediahuis has significantly strengthened its position in the southern Netherlands job market. After Limburgvac, it is the second Maastricht-based marketplace focused on jobs in our portfolio. This choice aligns with Mediahuis' broader focus on marketplaces in housing, work, cars and comparison sites.

BanenrijkLimburg and Limburgvac will continue to operate independently but will collaborate closely. Together, they publish more than 12,000 job vacancies a year and reach 60,000 jobseekers. By joining forces, we increase opportunities for companies and enhance the recruitment power of both platforms.

Armand Castermans, publisher of the local Mediahuis title De Limburger: "By working together, we can not only accelerate innovation but also improve support for both employers and jobseekers. The complexity of the job market requires in-depth knowledge in data analysis, marketing and technology. This collaboration lays the foundation for a strong future in which we not only strengthen our market position but also continue to grow."

By continuing to invest in digital job platforms and innovative technologies, Mediahuis is building an ecosystem that brings together supply and demand in the job market with maximum effectiveness.

"I see Mediahuis Marketplaces as an octopus. We are penetrating deeper and deeper into the world of real estate agents, car dealers and recruiters with our tentacles. If you want to upload a car for sale in Ireland, it goes through our system. If a dealer wants a website there, we make it. And data about the cars? You can request that from us. We have to keep the brands big and the platforms attractive for consumers. Our marketing, IT and sales departments have to work very hard, but otherwise, you get overtaken."

## Many irons in the fire

It is clear that Mediahuis Marketplaces has already achieved a lot, but Xavier remains grounded and is focused on achieving even better results. "I want to double that almost 10% profitability in the long term. In 2025, I hope that Mediahuis

Marketplaces will reach 30 brands. We have many irons in the fire; many potential acquisitions are waiting."

Acquisition or investment in a start-up doesn't come from nowhere. Xavier explains how Mediahuis arrived at the eight "winners of the future" in its portfolio. "We had almost 3,000 European companies on the radar in property tech and recruitment tech. We went through that entire list to focus on a few and fully scrutinise and assess their potential. That's how the eight winners emerged."

Two examples of such pearls are WorkerHero in Germany and the Swedish Impactpool. Both companies have a completely new model focused on profile building and ensure that employers in sectors where it is difficult to find staff get more suitable candidates.





## Support from shareholders

When asked about the obstacles on the way up, Xavier takes a different path. “I prefer to emphasise what is going well. We get a lot of attention from the shareholders. They know what we are doing and offer us lots of opportunities and support with acquisitions. They see the value!”

He also recognises the challenges. “A small acquisition is as much work as a large one. So you might as well go for the big acquisitions. But of course, there are many competitors,

often with lots of money. So we have to find a way to get in. We do that on a relationship level and with our expertise. We don't storm into a company like the Wolf of Wall Street. We support the management, and companies enjoy talking to us.”

Mediahuis maintains high standards in all areas, and Xavier sees that too. “We have to continuously innovate, stay relevant and keep our service and system security high. Rightly so. We operate in markets that are essential for consumers. Housing, work, cars: these are often life-changing moments. And we help

people make those decisions. Having an impact on consumers aligns very well with a company like Mediahuis.”

Hunting for opportunities for Mediahuis Marketplaces in multiple countries makes Xavier's work challenging, but he clearly enjoys it. “Every country has its own rules and dynamics, which can sometimes be quite challenging. Yes, I am often abroad, and there can be hectic days in between. And I have a family. In any case, I'm never bored. And that's a good thing! I'm someone who doesn't like to be bored.”

## Marketplaces evergreen portfolio

### Automotive



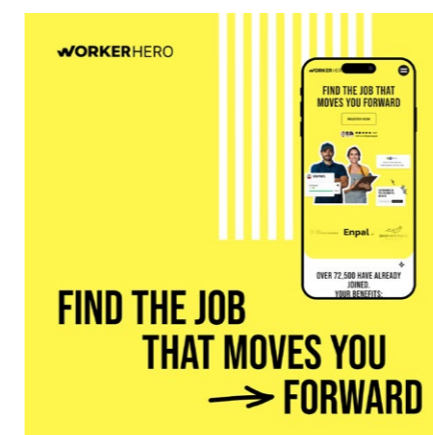
### Recruitment



### Housing



### Comparison



## WorkerHero: Tackling labour market shortages

In a tight labour market, finding the right candidate is a challenge. The Munich-based HR-tech start-up WorkerHero offers an innovative solution. With AI-driven sourcing and matching, the platform quickly and effectively connects companies with qualified candidates.

Since its founding in 2021, WorkerHero has focused on sectors with a significant shortage of skilled workers. Advanced technology means candidates are not only assessed on their skills and experience but also carefully pre-selected. This increases the chances of successful matches and significantly shortens the recruitment process. With more than 70,000 users and companies like Deutsche Telekom and HelloFresh already successfully recruiting through the platform, WorkerHero has proved its effectiveness.

Mediahuis led WorkerHero's Series A investment round in 2024. This underscores our vision of innovation and the digital transformation of the labour market. Mediahuis believes in the power of technology to improve markets and supports WorkerHero in its growth and mission.



## Impactpool: top talent for global impact

Impactpool is a Swedish career platform that helps organisations attract people to positions that contribute to sustainable development. Using smart technology, it connects professionals with jobs in the international development, humanitarian and impact sectors, making meaningful work more accessible.

Since its founding in 2015, Impactpool has supported more than 2,500 organisations and registered nearly 1 million candidates from 195 countries. Just last year, the platform matched 1.5 million professionals with impactful positions. What began as a network for UN organisations like Unicef and Unesco has grown into a global platform that also works with the World Health Organization, the OECD, the Green Climate Fund and businesses with a social mission.

Thanks to AI-driven matching and specialised talent pools, Impactpool helps organisations find the right candidates more quickly and efficiently. At the same time, professionals get better opportunities to use their skills for work that truly makes a difference.

Impactpool proves that innovation and social impact can go hand in hand. Mediahuis shares this vision and supported Impactpool's further growth in 2024 by leading the Series A investment round. We're contributing to a future where talent and impact come together.





# Greener direction through concrete goals

**Our green transition is one of the pillars of our IMPACT sustainability programme. With the validation of our targets by the Science Based Targets initiative, we are taking a significant step in 2024. This enables us to make more informed decisions.**

*Text: Caroline Swanenberg, Head of Sustainability, Mediahuis group*

*Image: Lars van den Brink*

## 3 pillars, 1 central mission

The first pillar of IMPACT stems from our central mission: the belief in independent journalism and strong news brands that contribute positively to society. In a world where facts and fiction are increasingly intertwined and information is available everywhere, people seek sources they can trust. For us, that trust is essential. It defines who we are and what we do and determines whether readers are willing to pay for our journalism and engage with our stories. That's why, in April 2024, our editors-in-chief launched the Trust Hub in Amsterdam, featuring initiatives such as participation in The Trust Project. The fact that multiple titles are now close to certification underscores our commitment to transparency and reliability.

The second foundation of IMPACT is a workplace where employees can be themselves, collaborate, learn and grow. Only when our journalists

and employees feel heard, valued and supported can they do their jobs with conviction and focus. An open and stimulating work environment is essential for this.

The third pillar of our sustainability programme is our green transition, the collective efforts we make to minimise our negative impact on the world. Our readers expect that from us, alongside trustworthy journalism. In recent years, Mediahuis group has set measurable goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2024, these goals were validated by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi). This is something we can take pride in, as it proves we are steadily and methodically working towards our goals.

**“Internally, we increasingly refer to our green transition as a basic hygiene factor”**

Caroline Swanenberg



## Our targets

Mediahuis' sustainability goals have been officially validated by the Science Based Targets initiative. This milestone confirms our group's commitment and ambition to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and contribute to global efforts to combat climate change.

### By 2030

- Reduce absolute Scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions by 49.8% compared to the 2019 baseline.
- Reduce absolute Scope 3 GHG emissions by 27.5% compared to the 2019 baseline.
- Ensure that 66% of suppliers (based on upstream transport and distribution emissions) set science-based targets by 2028.

### By 2050

- Reduce Scope 1 and 2 emissions by 90% compared to the 2019 baseline.
- Reduce Scope 3 emissions by 90% compared to the 2019 baseline.
- Achieve net-zero GHG emissions across the entire value chain by 2050.

## Responsible business practices

Internally, we increasingly refer to our green transition as our “daily hygiene factor”. We all need to be conscious of our carbon footprint every day and consider how we can reduce it.

We are already taking many steps: electrifying our vehicle fleet, exploring ways to make our printing and distribution processes more sustainable, scrutinising the origin of our paper and striving for climate-neutral offices. While commendable, these actions are not reasons to pat ourselves on the back. We simply see them as responsible business practices and a foundation for considering our next steps. For instance, we can analyse the impact of AI usage on our footprint. How

much electricity does it consume? And how much does energy consumption rise when everyone streams video content?

With the science-based targets guiding our environmental objectives, we will increase our measurement efforts, allowing us to calculate our actual emissions more precisely year by year. The graphs on the next page illustrate how our footprint has evolved. With concrete data, we can direct our sustainability efforts more effectively and make better informed decisions across all our businesses and activities, from newsroom operations to system development and supplier selection. By aligning our sustainability efforts with our financial goals, we can continue to ensure the success of our organisation in a responsible and sustainable way.

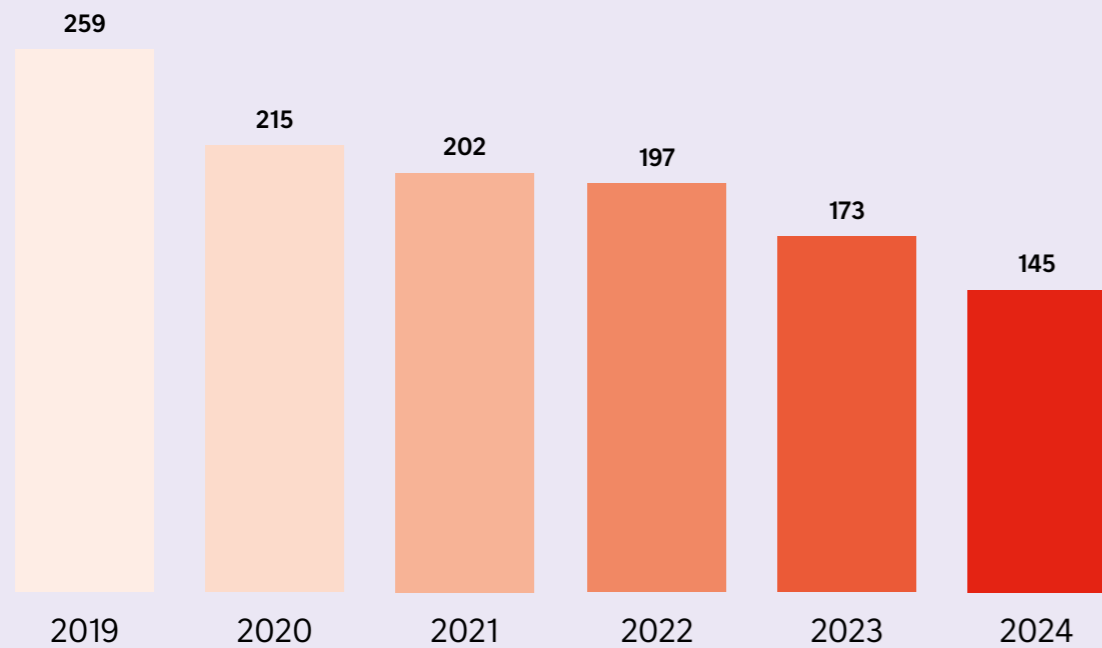


# Green transition report 2024

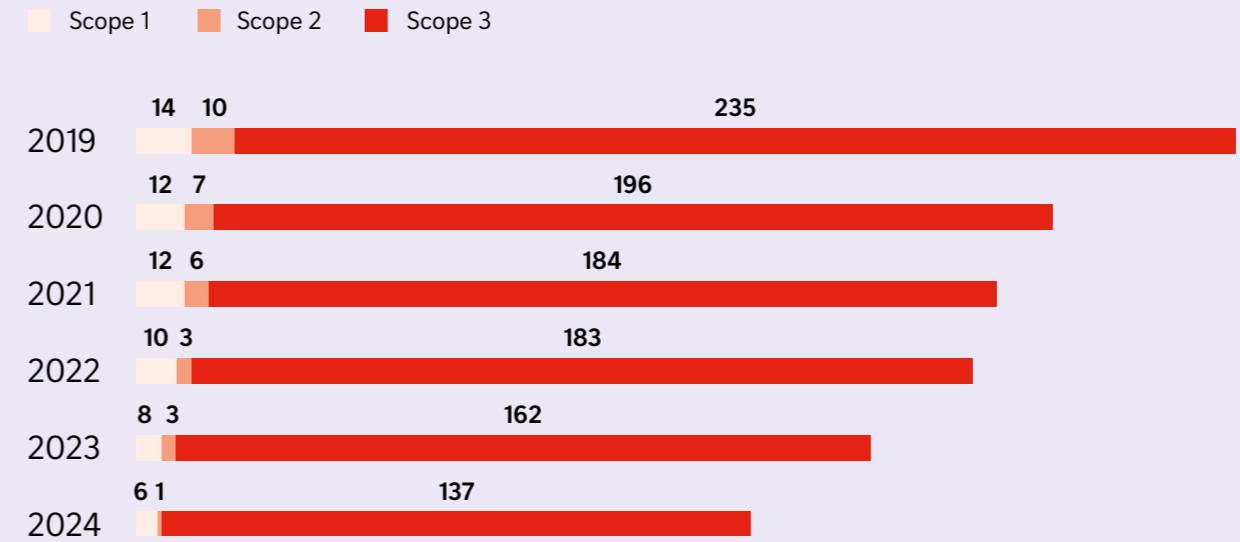
As part of our sustainability policy, we have been working for years to minimise our environmental impact. We do this by critically assessing, among other things, the printing and distribution of our newspapers, the energy consumption of our offices and the emissions from our vehicle fleet.

By 2050, we aim to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions across our entire value chain to zero. The goals we set for this have now been approved by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi).

## Evolution of Mediahuis footprint CO<sub>2</sub>e (ktCO<sub>2</sub>-eq)



## Evolution of Mediahuis footprint CO<sub>2</sub>e (ktCO<sub>2</sub>-eq) per scope



### Scope 1

We limit our direct CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by optimising the use of our buildings, reducing our gas consumption, implementing electric heating systems such as heat pumps and electrifying lease cars.

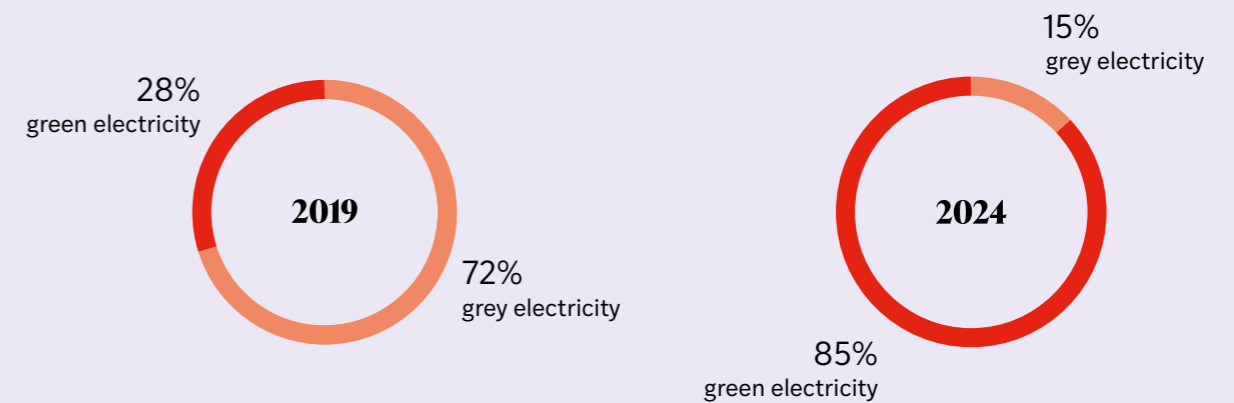
### Scope 2

We reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from purchased electricity by converting existing contracts to green energy contracts. We also lower our energy consumption by, for example, reducing the office and printing space we use.

### Scope 3

We make more sustainable choices in the procurement of goods such as paper and e-commerce and by organising our distribution more efficiently with fewer transport kilometres. The growing number of digital subscriptions also contributes to lower paper consumption.

## Evolution of share of green electricity





# Financial flexibility and ambition for further growth

**The continued success of the digital transition of our news brands, along with rising revenues from radio advertising and marketplaces, made 2024 a stable transitional year – despite increasing distribution costs. With optimisations in our products and processes, we also laid the foundation for a sustainable future.**

*Text: Kristiaan De Beukelaer, CFO Mediahuis group*

*Image: Frederik Beyens*



## Growth in radio and marketplaces

At €1.236 billion, our revenue remained virtually unchanged from 2023. Growth through acquisitions was limited. Our news media successfully continued the shift from print to digital without a significant impact on revenue. Meanwhile, advertising revenue received a boost from our radio activities in the Netherlands, and our marketplaces saw solid growth.

However, the sharp increase in distribution costs remains a major concern. In 2024, we were able to offset this with the effects of reorganisations and a lower, stable paper price. Due in part to the delayed impact of inflation on labour costs in the Netherlands and our investments in certain growth activities, our operating result came in at €151 million, only €2 million lower than in 2023.

The carefully calibrated pricing strategy of our news media, driven by an increasingly rich offering of journalism and services, was a key driver of our revenue. It helps our brands move toward the necessary stabilisation of margins, which remain under pressure due to rising distribution costs for print subscriptions. The termination of bpost's service in Belgium reinforces that trend.

Despite strong international competition, our digital advertising revenue grew, with video and audio playing an important role. Our Dutch radio stations Veronica, SLAM! and 100%NL strengthened our position in the advertising market. E-commerce continues to make a solid and stable contribution, thanks to a competitive and attractive offering.

The contribution of marketplaces to the operating result increased significantly in 2024, driven by the growth of Zimmo in Belgium and Motion and Switcher in Ireland. Additionally, our 49% stake in the Dutch Automotive MediaVentions venture also grew.

## Increasing agility and resilience

For Mediahuis, 2024 was a stable transitional year, with few new asset additions and a strong focus on initiatives to improve our agility and resilience in an increasingly complex world. Through automation and process optimisation within the group, we further optimised our cost structure.

The group's equity rose to €535 million after adding the annual result of €66 million. A stable asset portfolio, regular depreciation of intangible assets and a lower net debt position led to a slight decrease in Mediahuis' total balance sheet. The equity-to-total-assets ratio increased to 45%.

Our most significant investment in 2024 was the buyout of the minority shareholder in Medienhaus Aachen, alongside limited investments in our ventures and marketplaces portfolio. Combined with stable free cash flow, our net debt position improved to -€72 million, resulting in a financial leverage ratio of 0.37.

With a strong balance sheet and low debt levels, Mediahuis has the financial flexibility and ambition to continue growing in the coming years in a dynamic media landscape.

“With a strong focus on improvement initiatives, we are increasing our agility and resilience in a dynamic media landscape”

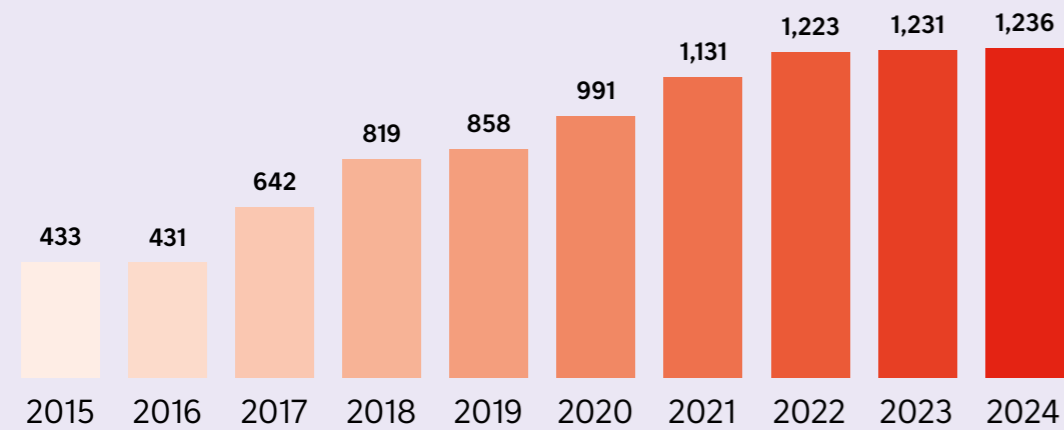
Kristiaan De Beukelaer



# Financial report 2024

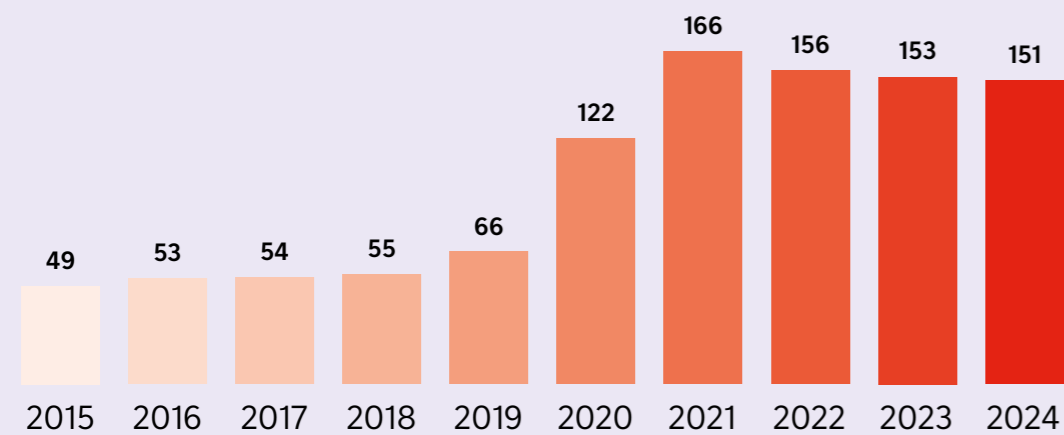
## Recurring operating revenue

in € million



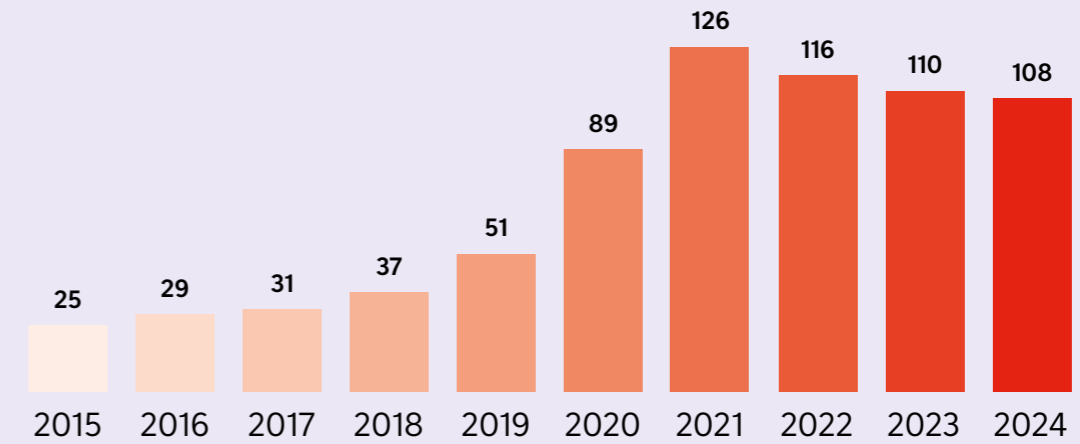
## Operating result

in € million – Earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT), excluding amortisation of acquisition goodwill and non-recurrent results



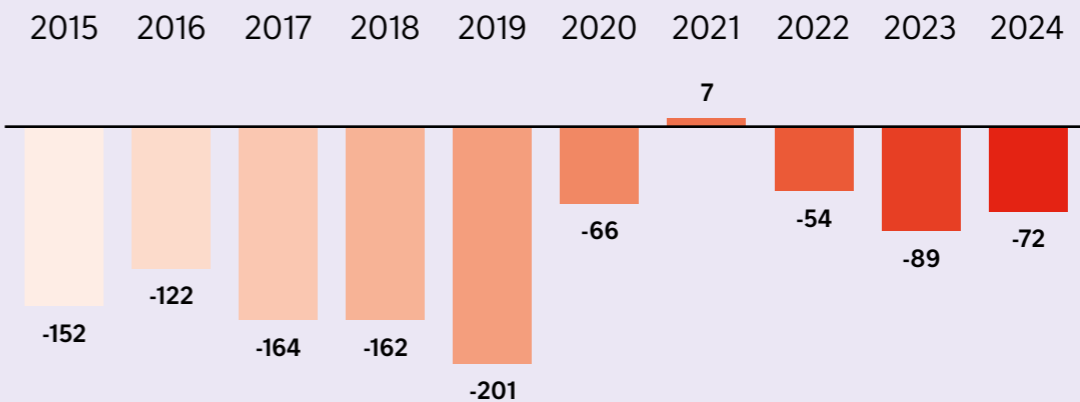
## Net recurring result

in € million – Operating result plus financial result (including result of participating interests in equity method), after deduction of corporate taxes

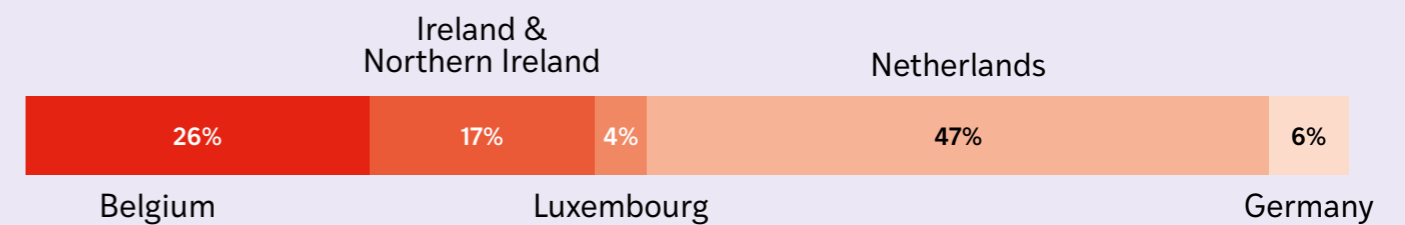


## Net debt

in € million – Cash and cash equivalents less bank liabilities, excluding operating lease obligations denominated under IFRS16 as debt



## Revenue per country





## Consolidated balance sheet

in € million

	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
<b>Fixed assets</b>	<b>983.0</b>	<b>1,017.2</b>
Goodwill and intangible fixed assets	684.3	712.2
Property, plant and equipment	178.9	192.1
Companies consolidated using the equity method	39.1	44.2
Financial fixed assets at fair value	58.8	48.9
Deferred tax assets	9.5	8.9
Other long-term receivables	12.4	10.9
<b>Current assets</b>	<b>211.1</b>	<b>216.8</b>
Inventories	17.4	20.2
Trade and other receivables	115.1	134.6
Tax receivables	13.4	7.8
Other current assets	33.4	24.9
Cash and cash equivalents	31.8	29.3
<b>Assets held for sale</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>1,194.1</b>	<b>1,234.6</b>
<b>Equity attributable to the shareholders</b>	<b>535.3</b>	<b>518.9</b>
<b>Minority interest</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>	<b>250.0</b>	<b>273.9</b>
Interest bearing loans and other borrowings	58.0	64.0
Lease liabilities	128.2	143.8
Derivative financial instruments	0.6	0.0
Pensions and other employee benefits	11.8	11.5
Provisions	1.4	2.5
Other long-term liabilities	2.0	2.8
Deferred tax liabilities	47.9	49.4
<b>Current liabilities</b>	<b>407.4</b>	<b>432.6</b>
Interest bearing loans and other borrowings	46.2	54.5
Lease liabilities	21.3	21.9
Derivative financial instruments	0.2	0.0
Trade and other payables	98.9	97.2
Prepayments	111.9	110.4
Pensions and other employee benefits	3.4	7.4
Provisions	13.5	18.4
Tax payable	1.0	6.7
Employee related liabilities	63.7	62.9
Other current liabilities	47.4	53.3
<b>TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>	<b>1,194.1</b>	<b>1,234.6</b>
Equity / Balance sheet total	0.4	0.4
Net financial cash / (debt) position *	(72.4)	(89.2)
Net financial debt / REBITDA	0.4	0.5

\* Interest-bearing loans minus cash, excluding IFRS 16 lease liabilities



## Consolidated income statement

in € million

	2024	2023
<b>RECURRING REVENUE</b>	<b>1,236.2</b>	<b>1,230.6</b>
<b>Operating expenses</b>		
Raw materials	(64.7)	(83.2)
Services and miscellaneous goods	(531.5)	(526.2)
Personnel expenses	(441.0)	(422.8)
Other operating expenses	(3.3)	(1.8)
<b>Operating expenses</b>	<b>(1,040.4)</b>	<b>(1,034.0)</b>
<b>REBITDA</b>	<b>195.8</b>	<b>196.6</b>
Operating depreciations	(44.7)	(43.5)
<b>OPERATING RESULT</b>	<b>151.1</b>	<b>153.0</b>
Exceptional gains / (losses)	(7.6)	(11.7)
Non operating depreciations and amortisation	(31.1)	(30.8)
Impairments and capital losses	(8.0)	(5.7)
<b>EBIT</b>	<b>104.4</b>	<b>104.9</b>
Results from financial assets	0.1	0.2
Other financial income	0.6	0.2
Finance costs	(11.3)	(9.4)
Share in the profit (loss) of companies consolidated using the equity method	(0.7)	0.2
<b>Result pre tax</b>	<b>93.1</b>	<b>96.1</b>
Corporate tax (charge) / credit	(27.8)	(26.5)
<b>NET RESULT</b>	<b>65.4</b>	<b>69.6</b>
Attributable to:		
Shareholders of the group	66.1	72.2
Minority shareholders	(0.8)	(2.6)
<b>RECURRING NET RESULT BEFORE AMORTISATION GOODWILL</b>	<b>108.1</b>	<b>110.2</b>

All figures in millions of euros. Mediahuis prepares consolidated financial statements applying IFRS.





# Board & management



Members of the Mediahuis Board of Directors and CEO Gert Ysebaert / Not pictured: Peter Hinssen

## Board of Directors

### Chairman

Thomas Leysen

### Vice-Chairman

Jan Baert

### Directors

Arian Buurman  
Patrick Hermans  
Peter Hinssen  
Anouk Mertens  
Filip Platteeuw  
Jan Suykens  
Guus van Puijenbroek  
Philippe Vandeurzen  
Philippe Vlerick

## Executive Committee

Kristiaan De Beukelaer	CFO
Martine Vandezande	CHRO
Paul Verwilt	COO
Gert Ysebaert	CEO

## Mediahuis Group Team



**Koos Boot**  
COO Mediahuis  
Nederland



**Kristiaan De Beukelaer**  
CFO Mediahuis group



**Andreas Müller**  
CEO Mediahuis  
Aachen



**Paul Peckels**  
CEO Mediahuis  
Luxembourg



**Peter Soetens**  
CEO Technology  
& Product Studio



**Dominic Stas**  
CEO Mediahuis NRC



**Geert Steurbaut**  
Secretary-General  
Mediahuis group



**Rien van Beemen**  
CEO Mediahuis  
Nederland



**Peter Vandermeersch**  
CEO Mediahuis  
Ireland



**Martine Vandezande**  
CHRO Mediahuis  
group



**Paul Verwilt**  
COO Mediahuis group



**Koen Verwee**  
CEO Mediahuis België



**Gert Ysebaert**  
CEO Mediahuis group





# Colofon



## Coordination

Mediahuis: Maud Dekker & An Steylemans

## Translation

Sally Tipper

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Many thanks to all Mediahuis colleagues  
who helped create this annual report.

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